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15¢ JULY-AUG.

EARTH NEEDS A KILLER
FEATURE NOVEL
by Bryce Walton

BE YOUNG AGAIN!
FEATURE NOVEL
by Murray Leinster

BARRIER of DREAD
by Judith Merril



A DOUBLE-ACTION MAGAZINE

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Volume 1
Number 2
July — August
1950

★ Feature Novels

EARTH NEEDS A KILLER **Bryce Walton** 8

We have power, Berton, but we can't destroy—only you can prevent a catastrophe that will finish humanity!

BE YOUNG AGAIN! **Murray Leinster** 28

Professor Barr had a new angle on the old Elixer-of-Youth swindle, but Buck had a formula that really worked!

★ Novelet

MARTIANS, KEEP OUT! **Fritz Leiber, Jr.** 45

Hating and fearing the alien beings, few Earthmen realized that they were destroying their own freedom in the struggle!

★ Short Stories and Departments

SHADOWS OF EMPIRE **Lester del Rey** 57

When Earth's armies withdrew from Mars, the end was beginning.

TWO WORLDS FOR ONE **George O. Smith** 66

Professor Milton planned to divide the world—literally!

BARRIER OF DREAD **Judith Merril** 72

There was peace, plenty, progress—and a lurking fear...

READER'S PREFERENCE COUPON 79

TODAY AND TOMORROW 81

DOWN TO EARTH 82

THE SKY'S STILL THE LIMIT (editorial) 89

FROM THE BOOKSHELF (reviews) 91

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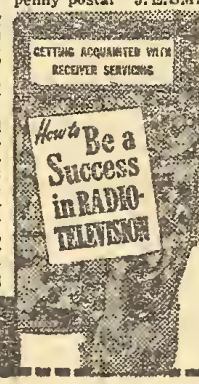
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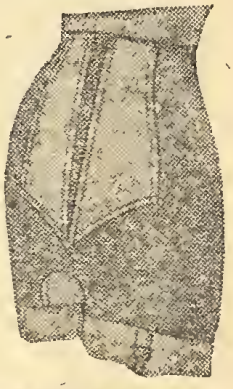
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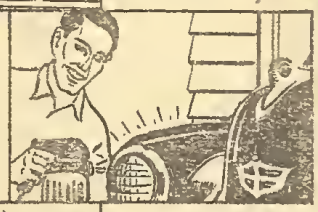
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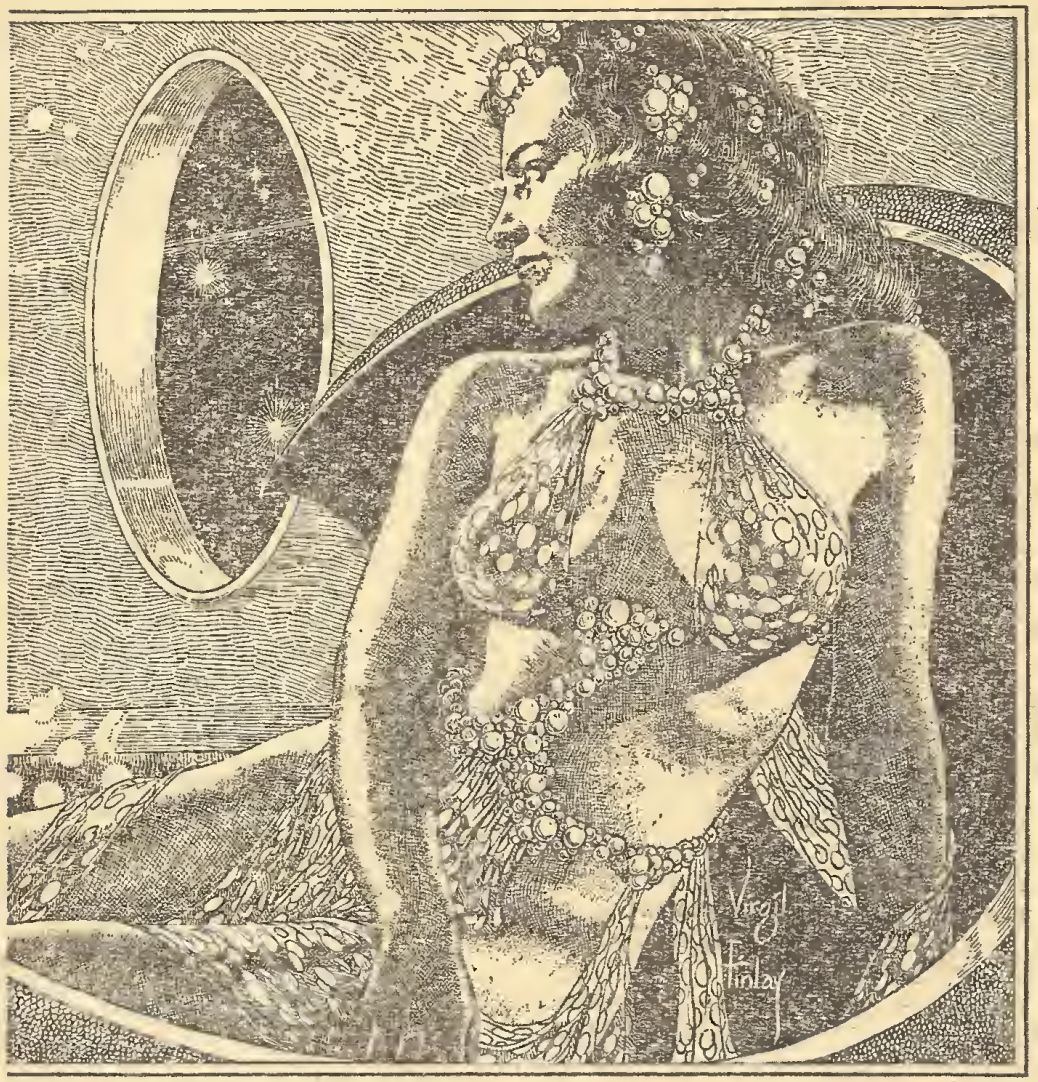


(Illustration by Finlay)

Earth Needs ★ ★ ★ ★ A Killer

DYNAMIC FEATURE NOVEL

by Bryce Walton



I jumped straight for the aristocratic gent, and swung a long stiff right to his jaw. He faded into the air . . .

You are the man we need, Ray Berton. You're a killer, but you're sane and rational. Those we are fighting are insane, irrational, and they'll destroy humanity if they are not stopped. We have power, but we can't use it for destruction, no matter how great the need. But we can give you power—then it's up to you!

From an evening tele-audocast by International Information Service, New York City, September 8, 1983: Reporter: *. . . and now, as a special dramatic interest story, here's something for the Fortean Society, though a more scientific diagnosis will certainly be forthcoming.*

At five P.M. today, a man's body materialized out of thin air at an altitude of over ten thousand feet above Uptown Manhattan. According to many reliable witnesses, the body plunged

down to smash into an unrecognizable mass on the plasticrete of Tier 19 and Grav-lift 6-H, Fifth Avenue II.

The reliable witnesses include twenty passengers of the trans-State jetliner, all of whom agree that the unknown man did materialize out of the air very near the liner's position as it circled for a cradle in La Guardia Field.

Every witness tells about the same story that the body did appear suddenly from the atmosphere. There was no other air vessel near. Also it was reported that another object followed the body out of the air, according to preliminary reports, a manuscript oddly written on a scroll of metal.

Stay visioed to I.I.S. for further reports on this Fortean mystery. The manuscript, we hope, will contain some kind of explanation which will be forwarded to you as soon as it reaches our news clearance scanners...

IT STARTS for me on Mars. I guess Mars is about the only place it could have started. Maybe they'll bring the real earth law there someday, and clean up dives like Jelahn's *krin-krin* tavern on the North Canal, a breeding place for crime, and where a man can be goaded into killing. That night I didn't care much.

The place was crawling with scum, strained through the sieves of Marsport, and Jokhara and Sanskran where the worst of the asteroid miners and space bums gather. Earthmen and Martians and half-breeds whom the Solar cops, said to be the toughest ever to wear a shield, would have gone at with care.

I was felling high, with enough *krin-krin* burning in me to make a Martian *srith*-dog sit up and talk Esperanto. And by the time I'd been blotting up *krin-krin* for a few hours, any space bum thinking to push me around was crazy. So the big yellow skinned Martian with the green eyes was crazy for trying to drag this breed tavern girl away from my table.

Crazy first, then dead. I'd seen plenty of dead men before, and I knew the look. I knew I'd hit him too hard as soon as he stretched on the bright green stones of Jelahn's tavern, and didn't try to get up. Standing there looking down at him, I knew he'd never get up by himself.

The whole tavern had dried up like a scab. The place was so quiet you could hear the Martian's blood trickling from his mouth onto the floor. "You certainly lowered that poor, poor Marty," somebody whispered.

I swung around fiercely, but the speaker eased away from me. "What in a blasted jet's the use of hitting a man, if you don't hit him right?" I yelled. I was drunk, and I was getting sick; I'd never liked the sight or smell of dead men.

Nobody said anything. Everybody looked at the dead Marty. The blood stopped running. I prodded him with my foot. Oh, he had the look all right, the kind a man only gets once and for always. People stared. Even on Mars, death isn't so common that it isn't interesting.

I could hear myself breathing in the silence. I was sick. I'd never been the kind of space tough one of those Martian Colonial Administrator's women would invite to a Double Moon tea, but just the same everyone doesn't like to kill.

My record wasn't too bad; brawls, drunks, a few killings in self defense. Born in the asteroids, father a prospector, me a prospector. At twenty-three, I'd hit a strike a month ago, and cushioned into the big port at Sanskran to unload, get more machinery and return to that meteorite where I'd hit "heavy" beryllium, paired-atom stuff worth twice its weight in platinum to the Atomician boys on Earth.

The breed girl, the cause of the trouble, cried, "He's dead!"

Nobody moved. Then the girl came at me; the few jewels, which was all she wore, flashed as red as her eyes and her clawing nails. "You killed him!" she screamed. I pushed in her face with my flat hand, and sent her sprawling beside the dead guy she was so nuts about.

The *krin-krin* went out of me. The place was hot and somebody said the cops were coming. There was no time

for talking or thinking or feeling sorry; I measured my chances and ran for the door. I knocked two guys out of the way and went through the blue stone doors into the street. Up the red stone street like it was swimming in blood, a black jetcar was coming fast under the shine of the Deimos.

Cops. I'd never had any trouble with them before. Now it was just Ray Berton and the cops—and nothing in between but the cold Martian night. So I turned and ran the other way. A knot of men came out of the tavern and came at me. I stopped. Another jetcar curved into the street from the other end of the block. *All right.* I turned, backed into the side of the triangle of stone, stood waiting and my fists were hard. I'd never had any parents, not much. My mother died when I was born, and twelve years later, my dad died from overexposure to above ten point cos-rays. It isn't anything to remember, seeing an old man die like that.

So I'd been a space bum, and ended up a drunken brawling killer in a North Canal scum sieve! *All right, so maybe you could have done better. Come on and get it, you guys who think you could have done any better. Come on, come on...*

And then it hit me. *Thought.* I big hot fist of it, punching into my head. A big exploding fire of thought—*but not my own.*

"Step over here into the shadows, Ray Berton."

I DIDN'T think of telepathy then, though I thought plenty about it afterwards. I stumbled back, wanting to get away, but scared. I started to sweat; somebody could get inside me, and stay there and do things to me. Things worse than a Martian cop could do with his coercoats and neuron twisters.

My head hurt and I yelled something. Everything around me started to melt and run together, and the stone under my boots got soft. I got a fading look at them, two of them, standing like purple shadows. A girl with black black eyes. And a man, a big Earthman, aristocratic and distinguished-looking, with eyes like polished Venusian fog crystals.

I heard the fading thunder from the spaceport outside Sanskran, and that was all, for a while. The next thing I knew I was coming into Earth, a place I'd never been, and wasn't supposed to be able to go to because I'd never been 'purified'. I had no Solar visa, I thought, and didn't want to go through the psyche treatment necessary to get one.

But a lot of things changed for me that night when they took me off that street. Teleportation, that's what it was—whatever *that* is. They had machines all right. Their minds and nervous systems, which they had perfected, were machines. Mind-energy, the basic energy.

I learned a little about that stuff later, but not very much.

Even after they gave me some of their 'power' like giving a kid candy, I didn't know what it was. Like any dumb atomeer can use the power of breaking atoms and not know anything more about physical science than a New York debutante knows about a *krin-krin* hangover. Like the experts who still can't tell you what electricity is.

I came out of the fog feeling pretty good, considering. I knew one thing right off, as any spacer would: I was in space, at C-acceleration, beyond the neutral-gravity point between planets, and in free fall.

I sat up on foam-rubber cushioning and this girl was looking at me with those black black eyes, so black they were almost purple. The big aristocratic guy was sitting beside her.

She was young and very nice to look at. Her eyes softened, and I felt more at ease. The gent smiled; both of them gave me the idea of having a lot more energy and vitality than any ordinary person.

"We saved you from the police," she said. Her body moved softly under skin-tight resensilk. She had used her voice, but I felt her thoughts. I knew she didn't have to use her lips to tell me anything. It was a funny feeling. "You're on a space-cruiser.

We'll be in a La Guardia field cradle in five hours."

"How?" I said. "How did it happen? How did you—?"

She shook her head. "You wouldn't understand. Not yet."

"All right," I said. "You saved my life, and a lot more. You may know how the Martian cops crack down. You did a lot for me." I leaned forward. "Now what's the catch?"

"You can repay us personally. You can do us a big favor in return. By so doing, you can possibly save Earth from annihilation."

I laughed and her eyes widened. "Wouldn't you want to do that?"

My laugh faded; she meant it. Maybe she was crazy, but she didn't know it. And for crazy people, they certainly had pulled a good job of getting me off that street, into a cruiser, and to Earth. Maybe some kind of a gag.

She said in a whisper. "You—*killed* a man!"

I looked into her eyes until I thought I was passing out. I clenched my hands. "An accident. Hit him too hard. I'm no killer, I—"

"But you did kill him, and you've killed before..."

"In self defense, sure," I said. "But out there in the Asteroids, you have to—"

She said. "I understand. Now, you'll do some things for us. You won't ask questions because you wouldn't understand; later, you may understand without asking."

I felt like the commonist kind of crook. "So you saved my life," I said, "just so you'd have a sucker to pull some kind of a job for you. Now I suppose if I don't want to do what you say, you'll threaten to turn me over to the Solar authorities for shipment back to the Martian cops!"

She flushed a little. "Wait," she said, "until you find out the truth, then I'm sure you'll *want* to help us. I'm sure you want to save Earth and its billions of people from death."

I SHRUGGED. "What'd Earth ever do for me? What's it ever done for any of the poor guys dying from cosmic-rays and getting killed because there aren't any laws out there? It takes our metal for precious atomician work, and what does it give us in return? A few lousy credits, and a sign saying 'Keep out—no admission'. The devil with Earth."

"You must help us," the man said very softly and yet very forcefully.

"You mean I've got no choice, is that it?"

The girl raised her eyebrows. "There would be no sense in your making a choice now; you can't understand, so no choice would be valid. It would be only blind emotionalism."

"I see." I was mad. I could handle this cruiser myself. I'd been kidnapped by people who considered me nothing more than a robot they were going to use. I swung my feet around, got them planted solidly down on the mesh grid flooring.

I got my hands down on either side of me so I could move fast and hard. "I see. Well, I'm not playing sucker for anybody."

I could hear the soft whispering of space against the platinum lined skin of the cruiser. Her eyes burned into me. I felt helpless and very much alone. But the devil with them I thought.

So I jumped straight for the aristocratic gent, and swung a long stiff right for his jaw. He faded into the air. I yelled wildly as he seemed to drift away like smoke, and into nothingness. I turned and there he was over in the corner of the cabin.

His eyes shot sparks, but he wasn't mad; he just looked grim. "You may cause us trouble when we cushion in," he said softly. "So I think you had better go back to sleep." He moved toward me. I tried to move my arms and legs, but I suddenly found that I couldn't move anything. "And perhaps it will be better if you have no more resistance to our suggestions after we reach earth."

His eyes seemed to expand out and out and out. It was like I was falling into a widening black pool.

"And," I heard his distant voice say, "that is the way it will be. Until you can make free choice of your

own, you will have to agree with us completely. Subconsciously you know we are right; some time you will know it with your full consciousness."

They had it all right, whatever it was. But not as much as their friends. They had as much of the greater power as you can have, and still be bounded by Third Plane reality.

It was mental power. Mind-energy they called paraphysical. Nothing trite, like I'd seen the quack women along the North Canal pull with mass hypnotism; this was something big and way beyond me.

I fell forward into a black hole.

2

Kill For Us!

THEIR names were Glora and Malcolm Mergon; he was her father. They could make suckers out of anyone they wanted to; they could get into another guy's mind and make him think, see, feel, hear anything they wanted him to. Take Extra Sensory Perception, and imagine somebody who's perfected all of it—and that's the way Glora and Malcolm Mergon were. Only more so.

We didn't need visas; we didn't have to go into the antiseptic wards; we didn't have to be scanned. Everytime we came into contact with Guards, or doctors or officers—those guys thought whatever Glora and Malcolm wanted them to think. So we walked right straight through all the red tape, and caught a sky-taxi to a sky-top hotel bordering Central Park West; by then it was noon of a nice spring day.

I sat there, sweating and feeling cold in spite of the even temperature. I didn't savvy anything; I felt like a kid who'd gotten lost.

They brought a three-dimensional map out of the air, I guess; I couldn't tell. It hung in the air like it was glued to nothingness. Glora moved around me and stood in front of the big tri-dimensional map. Her legs were long and slim and smooth; she'd be a prize for some big shot, I thought; but she wasn't my kind. My kind you'll still find along the North Canal, with very little on, and nothing in their heads but phony dreams.

"Now," she pointed at various marked sections on the map. "These are the locations of the ten Uranium Piles that supply all of Earth's power. If these piles should all reach critical mass at the same time, the earth would vaporize instantaneously.

"Scientific theory here is that even if all of them blew at once, though the destruction would be terrific, it wouldn't be fatal. That a hundred square miles around each pile would be destroyed only. That's so wrong, Ray. Through special abilities, Mal and I are aware of an unstable element existing here; Earth scientists can't discover it. If those Ten Piles reach simultaneous critical mass, it will react on this big unstable element. The Earth won't exist anymore."

I gulped. "Is that liable to happen?"

"It probably will, unless you can stop it from happening."

I felt gray sickness on my face, felt that she knew what she was talking about. "How?" I whispered. "Who'd want to do a thing like that?"

"There's an atomician Chief in control of each of those Piles. Men who have been tested and scanned and conditioned until the Atomic Energy Commision hasn't any doubt of their reliability. But we happen to know that an unintegrated personality of great mental power—powers like our own—has gotten control of these ten Chief's minds. At a specific time, acting in complete unconscious accord, they will respond to a post-hypnotic command already planted in their unconscious minds. Upon responding, they will allow those Piles to reach critical mass."

And so then, naturally, I wanted to know what that had to do with me.

Malcom Mergon spoke then. "So—you are going to meet this person who controls them. We can not move against those ten while he is around, and he is stronger than we are. When he is gone, then we can go to work on those Chief's minds. *You will have to*

kill this man!"

"Who is this man," I said, not very loud.

"Ronal LeStrang," he said. "President of Atomic Energy Commission."

I jumped up. I was mad and scared and confused. "Hey wait now! You think just because I'm a bit of nameless scum you picked up out of a Martian garbage pit, you can make a sucker out of me! I'm no professional killer! You guys are hypnotists. How do I know that what you're saying is fact? How do I know you aren't some foreign agents, wanting to start a world revolution or something? You think I can go out and kill a man just because a couple of guys tell me to!"

She pleaded with me. "That's why we came to Mars, Ray," she said. "We might never have found anyone like you otherwise. You're strong, you have courage, and very strong latent ESP potentials. But more than any of those things, you can—*kill.* Except for on the frontier planets and the asteroids, the ability to kill has been bred out by the new psychogenic surgery and conditioning marts."

She hesitated, then said. "And he has to be killed, Ray; that's the only way left. Killing is destructive, and we can't do it. We're mentally incapable of doing it. But he isn't; that's our handicap. You've got to help us."

And I knew she was right. Whether I knew it because of my own thinking, or whether Malcolm Mergon's mind had forced me to know it—that wasn't important any more. I knew I had to do it.

He moved toward me. His eyes burned.

"Wait," I said quickly. I looked around for a way out. I was trapped, and I didn't know whether I really wanted to get away or not. I only knew I was scared of what they could do to my mind. My mind wasn't much, but I was used to it. It was all I had. "Wait a minute, you guys. Give me a chance. Give—"

"We haven't much time, Ray," he said. "But first we must give you some added ability. It's already in you, but it's dormant. We'll bring it into the active stage. Maybe you would like to have some of the—power that we have, Ray? Anyway, you will need it. Now, Ray, go back to sleep so we can give you the power. It won't take long. Go back to sleep, Ray.

"Ray, go back to sleep!"

* * *

THIS TIME when I recognized daylight again, I was different. I felt funny, not the same; things were twisted around now. I was walking down the big new Eighth Tier of Uptown Broadway, feeling the jet-cars pushing past in their different speed lanes. The sun was shining on the big lacework of tiers and tubes, and I was walking. But things were not the same.

I felt like everything that had happened since hitting the Martian in Jelahn's tavern was part of a dream, and that now I was coming awake maybe for the first time. The life around me looked faded, blurred, not quite real.

I had some of *their* power all right. I could feel it, and it was like a new kind of Martian rotgut was giving me a crazy highness. I felt like I'd suddenly gone screwy, but didn't care—as though nobody could touch me for it. I had some of their power, whoever or whatever they were, but not very much I thought; just enough to help me kill Ronal LeStrang.

A tele-audio flash information band on the side of the building shocked me as I stared at it. It gave the date. September 6, 1983.

Since Malcolm Mergon had walked toward me saying "Ray, go back to sleep," it had been three weeks! I'd been out three weeks. It jolted me. Three weeks. Work on my brain; work on my body; do things to my nervous set-up; make me different. This Glora and Malcolm Mergon—I knew they could do an awful lot to a guy in three weeks.

I stumbled a little, ran into a cute little blonde. She glared at me then looked scared. I felt her thoughts, felt hundreds, thousands of thoughts that belonged to the pedestrians around me, swarming and beating at

my head like moths at a light. "He's a drunk!...looks like one of those non-rehabilitated space men. ...see the cosmic-ray burns on his face... stay away from him...dangerous..."

Dangerous, sure. They'd done plenty to me, but I didn't know what nor how much. And I didn't even know why...not for sure; just what they'd told me to believe. But I remembered—dangerous—I was supposed to kill.

A piece of uncultured, ignorant, un-psyched space-rot! Picked up and brought to Earth to do a murder job. They got me, Ray Berton, killer. But that wasn't enough for them, oh no. They had to give me added abilities—make me a super-delux killer!

Me, Ray Berton. The guy who would save the world!

I TOOK a grav-raise tube up the building front to the top of the big central UN Building in International Square. I stepped into a scanning cubicle. A mechanical voice said: "State the purpose of your visit, please."

I stared around me at the mosaiced floors and walls. A super-super delux killer. And with one of the most important men in the world to kill. I knew that, through Glora and Malcolm, I'd made an appointment. Made it sound important.

"An appointment to see Mr. Ronal LeStrang. About a 'heavy' beryllium strike in the asteroids." As head of the Atomic Energy Commission, LeStrang would be more than willing to have a personal talk about that. The Earth was supposed to be International minded, but it was still a case of getting the most and getting it first then saying "See!"

"You may go in, Mr. Berton."

I dropped my right hand into my jacket pocket, wrapped my fingers around a small coiled bunch of deadly metal. Metal with a trigger that would release enough energy to kill the biggest man in the world as quickly as any other.

As I came into the big glass-lined office, LeStrang got up from behind a desk. He was short and stocky, with a naked-looking head and white eyebrows. There wasn't any sense in wasting time, I figured. I had a slight advantage of surprise; I took it.

I jumped across the room, and took the little neutron gun out of my pocket. Before LeStrang could shrug his eyelashes, I had that gun jabbed right at his belly.

I shivered. His body didn't look real. His eyes didn't belong in that body; they seemed to flame out at me. I felt thought fingers grabbing at my mind, but there seemed to be automatic shields clicking into place, blocking him.

"The interview's over," I said, and started to pull the trigger.

Something stopped me. Sweat ran into my eyes; I felt like I was going to lay down on the floor. His eyes looked at my cosmic-rayed face, the purple scars of burns from the wild radioelements of the asteroids.

I heard myself whimpering like a scared *srith*-dog. His thoughts were stronger, in a way, than Glora's or Malcolm's. They started eating away at my mind like dark acid—thought fingers getting hold and trying to squeeze like my brain was a sponge.

"Glora and Mal sent you of course. They couldn't touch me here, so they sent you. I didn't think they'd stoop so low as to hire animals to work for them. Well, they can't win anyway; I had the thing all set, but now it's just a case of postponement. I'll fix it next time so they can't stop me."

I raised the neutron gun. "Next time," I said. "There isn't going to be any."

He laughed softly at me. As I started to fire, his body faded; it became nothingness right there in front of me, like it had turned into smoke, and then the smoke became transparent. Then there was nothing at all. Just a big room that seemed empty even though I was in it. He had disappeared, but I hadn't fired.

For a minute I went completely blank. I felt numb all over, then panic hit me. LeStrang had disappeared in front of me. I knew he hadn't been wiped out; he'd just gone someplace else. That was part of this —power. Mental power. Glora and Malcolm Mergon had it. LeStrang had it—

And Ray Berton—no that was crazy! Maybe I could send and receive thoughts. But a lot of ESP groups could do that. It was still borderline stuff, not accepted by the big shots scientists. Telepathy, and —ESP included other wild talents, I knew. An old woman on the South Canal had claimed to have the power of teleportation. Gamblers talked about telekenisis.

I had to get out of LeStrang's office; I was trapped there, and I'd be the goat if caught. From somewhere, I heard Glora's thought voice calling.

"Get out of that office, right now, Ray! Hurry. We'll help you. Get rid of doubts. You can do it; think about how you can do it. Come back here to us, Ray. Back to us. Right now. All of you, at once, right now. Think of us, visualize us, this room. You're not there. You're here. *You're here, Ray! Here!*"

And she was right. I wasn't in LeStrang's office anymore.

I was someplace else, and as close to death as I'd ever been in my life.

I re-formed, I guess you would say, but somehow I missed the inside of Glora and Malcolm's skytop suite. I suddenly found myself hanging in empty air, just outside their window.

A hundred and twenty some stories straight down—air. I started to fall, then grabbed the window ledge. But the shock had weakened me so much I don't think I could have held on. Glora and Malcolm came to the window, grabbed my wrists and dragged me inside.

I fell down on my knees. I didn't have the strength to stand up. My clothes were wet, and I held my hands down hard on the floor to keep them from shaking.

Malcolm said. "Too bad. He went through the Barrier. He is back in Fourth Stage reality now; we will go to work on the ten Uranium Pile men and remove the posthypnotic commands from their minds. We can do that, now that he has gone back through the barrier. But he can come back here, Ray; he will plan something, some way to defeat us.

"Ray—you will have to go through the barrier after him. You will have to develop Fourth Stage consciousness; you will have to grow beyond Earth's Three Stage reality. You still have to kill him, Ray."

3

Through The Barrier

I DIDN'T have any idea what they were talking about then. They were so urgent and desperate, I guess they forgot that I was just an ignorant, no-good space bum who'd happened to strike it rich, and then gotten himself into a killer's brawl.

Later I got to know a little about the various stages of consciousness and how they determine what reality is.

But then, I knew next to nothing; so I asked them again to please explain what it was all about. They tried to explain, but you can't explain color to a man who'd never seen color. And that's the way it is with trying to explain Fourth Stage reality, the next step above three-dimensional awareness, to a man who's all tied up in the blindfold of three-dimensional perspective.

LeStrang and Glora and Malcolm were Fourth Stage people. They had come back through a barrier, a state of mental awareness separating Third from Fourth dimensional reality; they had come back through this barrier from the Fourth Stage plane of reality. This is coexistent with Earth's Three Stage plane, and it's called Mohln.

LeStrang had come through to destroy Earth; then Glora and Malcolm, at great sacrifice, had followed him into Three Stage Plane, or Earth, to try to stop him.

Their only chance was to get some sucker, someone who could be destructive, as they said. They couldn't. So I'd been picked, and had chased the mad guy back where he came from. Back to Mohln, the Fourth Stage.

According to Malcolm and Glora, when LeStrang came back through the barrier a second time, he would probably have some way to destroy Earth that couldn't be stopped—not

even by me, the big super-super killer.

"His is a paranoid mind," Malcolm Mergon said. "He is unpredictable. His delusions of two different realities may change its course of action, but his psychological character can't change. His methods will; he is destructive. That is his goal, motivated by paranoiacal desire for revenge, because of persecution. He must be killed; that is the only way. We have tried everything else. We can not influence him mentally. There is no rapport with diseased and twisted personalities, such as his."

I felt as though I didn't have any mind of my own left—and I didn't care much. I was bigger than any lousy human I'd ever met, besides Malcolm and Glora, or LeStrang. Maybe a few ESP guys around the planets had a little of what I had, but nothing like me. I didn't want to go back to being a narrow Third-Plane mind, squeezed down to blind thinking not much above any other animal's.

So I agreed to go through the barrier. There was a lot of explanation there, too, and I guess I remember some of it; something about reality —being relative to degrees of awareness.

He talked about how consciousness was a great machine that evolved slowly, powered by basic energy, the energy that makes atoms and electrons. He told me about how this machine evolved, how it was once only one-dimensional in its awareness, then two-dimensional, then three. But that there were ever higher degrees of awareness; and for each definite plane of increased awareness, was another coexistent world.

They told me how the evolution was gradual, sporadic among different people, but gradual among species over millions of years of time. And now the increase in extra-sensory perception showed that more and more third-stage minds and nervous systems were developing very close to breaking the barrier into Fourth Stage awareness. A new world. A new reality of tremendously expanded senses.

That's what he said, Malcom Mergon.

Then he said that the mind and the nervous system being a great and highly complex machine powered by the basic energy of the cosmos, that machine could be tinkered with, changed, stepped up—automatically —if the tools were available.

They had the tools; they had minds so far above mine it wasn't anything you could even talk about. Not and make any sense out of it. Everyone has the latent capacity to develop Fourth Stage consciousness. Even a one-celled amoeba, given time, will develop it.

But me—they were going to make me develop it fast. My sensory apparatus would grow in complexity and degree of awareness of higher-stage reality. And I would be in that other plane of Mohln where the guy I was after had gone.

I didn't understand. But I had the feeling that I—might.

I said for them to go ahead and give me the business. And they did; I went through the barrier.

* * *

BEHIND the wall of that room above Manhattan, they had a small square cell. They put me in it, and a reddish light filled the room and started eating into me. There were no doors, no windows in it, nothing but naked bare walls. And they went to work on me. They turned hidden power on me I suppose, but anyway they changed me.

I don't know what they changed; I probably couldn't explain it if I did know. Nervous system, mind, those dormant ESP abilities everyone has in one degree or another.

Malcolm had given me an example of one stage reality—a line, with everything else as the unknown, or time. And then the two stage reality, where height became time, then the Third Stage reality where the Fourth became "time"—

It got over my head there; I felt sick and my head felt like it was flying in a million parts. But by then, they said, my Fourth Stage potential

was ready for the final treatment. And I was ready to break through.

There was a terrible kind of concentration with Glora and Malcolm giving me mind-energy way above my own. Something seemed to burst inside of me. There was pain beyond pain; after that faded away there was a kind of quiet drifting that seemed to go on through a soft cloudy nothingness for a long time.

The four walls of that small cell blurred, but remainded as a misty outline. The reddish light faded; black night took its place; the black turned to gray. For a while it was like two superimposed pictures; the cell, and behind it another place.

Then the cell was gone.

I was standing in a dim twilight that had a soft blue tone to it. I was in a much bigger room now. The walls were a funny color, like gray human flesh.

I stared at the wall as I climbed to my feet, wishing there was a door or window so I could see out. And as I looked a window was there! Or rather, an opening melted away for me.

A feeling of wonderfulness, of magnificence went through me. I staggered like I was drunk with a feeling of thundering joy. I walked over and looked out. A soft sun was setting over soft purple hills. Everything was like that, soft and inviting and warm; beauty, like in a dream that you forget when you wake up. That's what it was like. And I knew there was much more I couldn't see or feel.

They had expanded my mind so much that Third Stage reality was gone. I was in another world of awareness. But I guess even *they* couldn't expand my mind enough to see what the real Fourth Stage was, all of it I mean. Maybe we'll all know, sometime.

There was a sensation of *aliveness*—in everything. Walls, floor, ceiling, the very air, all the outside of the room, the green fields and giant ferns, everything seemed alive. And when I walked there was that feeling of bursting freedom.

Malcolm had said that with increasing awareness, a similarity developed. One got nearer to the basic energy of all things with his own expanding mind. But this wasn't for me to understand; maybe it won't be for but a very few—not for a long time yet.

I looked out. I wanted to be out of that room and down there on that wonderfully soft grass with the ferns that seemed alive and calling to me. A square of grayish metal moved out of the wall and came to me. I knew what to do. I sat on it, and it carried me out of the room, through the wall, and down to the ground. There was a connection between the processes of thinking in me, my wishes, and the hidden machinery in the metal square.

Machinery powered by some great efficiency that used mind-energy. I got off the square and it raised and went back through the wall of the tall cone-shaped tower. And as I looked, the tower disappeared. Where it had stood was a field of shoulder-tall flowers with bright red blossoms.

I STARTED walking. A path opened for me. Fern fronds parted and closed again behind me. Water gushed over rocks in the cool shadows. It wasn't very light, though the moon was full and red, and I walked carefully, senses I'd never known before sharply tuned for danger.

I saw her then, a Fourth Stage girl, as I came round a curve in the path. Her skin was golden and soft, like everything else around us. She stared at me.

Her voice was like music. "You just—came through?"

It wasn't a question. She knew I had just come through the barrier. I don't remember whether we talked verbally or by telepathy. But on Mohln it doesn't make any difference.

She nodded. "Yes," and started walking toward me. She didn't seem quite real; nothing here seemed solid, quite real. Or it was more like I couldn't see quite enough to make it very real for me. Like a man who has lost part of his vision.

She looked like Glora, and she gave out with a sobbing cry of joy as she probed my mind and knew everything about how I had come through, and why. She ran to me and took hold of my hands; her body glowed and her breath came faster. "I'm Reeta. Glora is my sister. I've been wondering if they would send someone through."

She stepped back. "We must get him—Durach—fast!"

She caught my confusion. "Durach, same man as LeStrang. Here he is Durach."

Reeta turned, led me through a wall of fern branches and onto a different path. "We could go to my brother Carleth the other way," she said softly—referring, I knew, to teleportation. "But we can't strain your newly acquired senses too much now. Ordinarily, one b r e a k i n g through has many days just for readjustment and adaptation. But you won't have any time at all for that. Durach is already acting against us; he's killing us."

She was running, and leading me. She ran effortlessly, like somebody without weight. "We'll go right to the village and see Carleth, my brother. We haven't much time. Maybe we're already too late, Ray Berton!"

As I ran, I wondered what had happened to the real LeStrang back on Earth, the Third Plane. Durach had gone through the Barrier and had taken LeStrang's place; he'd gotten away with it by using his extra-senses. By suggestion he could have made everyone else think he was LeStrang. And he could have gotten rid of LeStrang easily enough— For example by just willing him some place else, all at once. Say five thousand feet under the Earth's surface, or in the middle of the Atlantic, or out in space.

Then Durach had become LeStrang for a while, long enough to interview each of those Uranium Pile chiefs, and put them under his domination. He'd given them a hypnotic command, posthypnotic, for each to allow his Uranium Pile to reach critical mass upon a certain signal. I didn't know how he'd worked that—

Reeta led me down through an underground tubeway and into a big bubble. A warm soft light shone inside the bubble. Small cone buildings were built in a neat circle. In the center were gardens and fountains. People stared and whispered at me.

Reeta stopped, her face suddenly froze, and then turned slowly with sick eyes. Her fingers pressed her cheeks.

A wrenching scream stabbed through that garden. Still screaming and clutching her head, a woman came running crazily down a path through the center of the village. Faces of men, woman and children came out of buildings, staring and flinching with sick pain.

The woman ran with her hands reaching out in front of her. Her neck was straining like a starving bird's. I felt Reeta's fingernails dig into my arm. The voice hit me like a spray of ice. "Another one! Another one to Durach and his freaks!"

The tortured w o m a n ' s cries chopped at me. My ears hurt; my insides knotted. She was still screaming and running when she suddenly fell on her face. She lay there jerking and twitching a m o n g the smashed flowers. Other people were running toward her, tall, marvelously strong and light moving people. I thought of them as being like gods, maybe. The woman's body stopped moving as two men bent over her.

I could tell it wouldn't move again. It had that look.

"Dead," Reeta whispered. "They don't last long once Durach and his gadgets pierce our last protective neural defense bands. We've had no real defense. Even the last, or *sith*-threshold, is temporary. He's hit us with various degrees of destructive mental force, augmented by his gadgets. We've resisted each stage, but not the *sith*-threshold breaker. Durach's closing in fast now that he's weakened us. He wants full control of the Merger, so he can go back into

the Third Stage plane and destroy it."

I thought it was all about as clear as Venusian moonlight. I turned quickly as a low soft voice spoke. I knew it was Carleth, her brother, standing just outside the nearest cone building. He was tall and terrifically strong looking. He was studying me, inside and out.

Then he looked at Reeta. "Give the thought order to both our villages right now! That Glora and Mel have sent a man with Third Stage abilities through. Tell them to throw up full resistance in the *sith*-sector. Maybe that way, we can hold Durach's attacks off until Berton can get to him."

4

"There Is Durach"

CARLETH led me inside the cone, right through the wall. I felt the humming of delicate machinery as though it was part of the working of my own brain. An opening that closed again behind us.

I sat down. I was very tired. Something was very wrong; I knew that. Here I was—but here I wasn't. I was through the Barrier, with enough of this so-called awakened consciousness to live in the Fourth Stage world of perception; but I wasn't like Reeta or Carleth, not by a long shot.

I almost yelled as the chair reached up around me and stretched itself to fit me. I shifted my position, and the chair remolded itself to me. I was still trying to get rid of a clammy helpless feeling when Carleth said: "We still may have time to act against Durach. We've saved this last paraphysical resistance band in each of our minds until the last. He's broken down the others since he came back through the barrier. He might be able to kill the rest of us within an hour."

He looked at me strangely. "One hour perhaps, Ray Berton, to save your world, Earth, from annihilation. One hour to get Durach."

Fine, I thought, but first, I'm hungry. And a tray of food floated out of the wall and settled down on my lap. A steak, and all the accessories, just what I'd wished I had.

While I ate, Carleth told me that people here didn't get energy that way when they had stayed here long enough. Here, he said, they used a process that Third Stage minds call telurgy. Fourth Stage minds use telurgy to construct their buildings, and transportation, and to get energy directly from any element they wanted to get it from. The only difference, he said, between any objects is made by our limited consciousness (Third Stage) reacting to differently shaped electron-identity patterns. Yet basically every substance, everything in the cosmos, is the same, made different only by degrees of evolving mental machinery.

I finished eating and said. "You're supermen here—that it? But if you are, why are you helpless before this guy Durach? Why do you have to call on me?"

Carleth said. "No, we're not supermen, Berton; just extended, or advanced men. There'll never be supermen; there'll never be perfection."

Carleth turned; he looked at the wall and it melted away. I was looking at a distant city. And what a city! Cone-shaped spires thousands of feet high, and one high above the others, with the moon behind it.

Carleth said. "This Fourth Stage world of Mohln is sparsely populated; only a few have come through. We built these two small villages, for meditation and self development. We lived here, helping others who came through to adjust and realize their growing potentialities. It was peaceful then. Normally, it would be no other way here—sane and balanced and marvelously stimulating as we discovered and developed new abilities of Fourth Stage power."

He stared at the distant city, and said to me. "Then Durach and his freaks came through. They built that city. It might be called by you a city of the mind. Their diseased minds keep it there by paraphysical mental energy."

"Freaks," I said. "Here too?"

"Yes, freaks; they're different. There's only seven of them, and that they should build such a colossal futile city is proof enough of their pathological, third-stage thinking. Third plane disease still motivates them, even though they developed enough Fourth Stage awareness to come through the barrier. They're paranoids, according to Third Stage standards. Here, they're much worse than that—able to realize many of their delusions.

"But they're freaks. They didn't develop by evolution to reach Mohln; they developed suddenly. As soon as they first came through, we knew they were abnormal, that they didn't belong. Durach brought Third Stage irrational, blind, destructive motivations with him. Diseased personality attitudes. He wanted power; he wanted to rule and conquer blindly. There had been an accident that sent him here.

"Durach and his freaks were seven chances in millions, but they happened. Teratological freaks, monsters. Before they broke away from us and built that mental city, we found their secret."

Carleth fell silent for a moment, then continued softly. "Durach and the others there are offsprings of Third Stage men and women who were exposed to gamma rays, from experimental radioactivity, from the last war, from various conditions on Third Stage Earth allowing over-exposure to hard radiation.

"Durach's father was an atomician engineer who was subjected to gamma rays while working in one of the imperfected Uranium Piles, sometime during 1964, according to Earth reckoning. Five years later, Durach reached what is adult maturity in the Third Plane. He organized some other freaks who were being kept on a small island off the coast of Japan. A year later they had developed sufficiently to break through into Mohln."

"There's only twelve of us left. You see no one here's in the same stage of Fourth Plane awareness; some develop faster than others. That makes us have different degrees of susceptibility to Durach's mental attacks. Reeta and myself, we happen to be the highest, now that Mal and Glora have gone back into Third Stage existence."

IT WAS strange, hearing him say these things with hatred in his voice. Yet, I knew he hated this menace... "Durach and the other freaks have feelings of inferiority. They want to compensate, they have developed paranoid delusions. They were persecuted on Earth, naturally as freaks. Regarded as insane, imprisoned, mistreated. They have strong revenge motives; they want to destroy Earth.

"Also, Durach has a theory that Third Stage Earth is holding back the development of Mohln. He thinks that if Earth's plane was destroyed, Mohln could expand into complete Fourth Stage reality.

"Durach made a Merging machine to open a channel between the two coexisting planes. What it really does is regress consciousness molecules to lower and lower stages of development until it becomes again bounded by Third Stage blindness. Durach made the Merger to help him and his freaks destroy Earth's plane. What they don't realize is that the two planes are the same, part of the same reality field, except that one is the result of more complex powers of awareness."

I thought about what Carleth had been telling me. It all started to fit together. I told him what had happened on Earth—about Durach getting control of the minds of the ten Chiefs who ran the Uranium Piles.

Carleth nodded. "You ran Durach back here into Fourth Stage reality. Since then he's been using various kinds of gadgets to destroy us, one by one. A kind of electron force feeler, you might call it. We've caught flashes of his purpose, though they keep their diseased minds locked up pretty well. It's almost impossible, and sometimes de-

structive, to try to contact them mentally.

"He intends to return to Earth through the Merger. This time he'll take the secret of the electronic feeler with him. He'll be able to kill Mal and Glora with it. He'll be more powerful there than they are, because in returning to Third Stage reality, they've sacrificed most of their Fourth Plane capacities.

"In other words, the next time Durach goes through the barrier, he'll achieve his purpose. He'll have killed all of us by the electronic feeler. It disassociates electron structure of the nervous system so that it can't reform."

"And I'm the only one who can stop him," I whispered.

Carleth said that was right.

I said, "Why doesn't Durach use the Merger then, right now, and go back and get the job done?"

He explained that to me also. "As soon as he came back this time, we knew what he had tried to do, what he was planning. We got conscious control of the Merger machinery, or part of it anyway. We've maintained that control because we have greater numbers, and the combined mind-energy has been too much for Durach. That is why he's been killing us one by one. Our power over the Merger has been going down. The danger point is reached now."

"And what about Mal and Glora?"

"They followed Durach into Third Plane reality to try to stop him. By so doing, they sacrificed most of their higher abilities. Durach, being a freak, an abnormal Fourth Stage man, came back through. But Glora and Mal cannot; they can never attain Fourth Stage life again."

Carleth paused, then said. "You can destroy, Berton; we cannot. Therefore, you're the last chance of defeating Durach."

I thought about everything, as much as I could. About how bitter it would be to know the feeling of being a part of this higher world of Mohln, then finding yourself once again in the blind and groping world of the Third Plane where no one had any idea of what greater reality was so near.

REETA CAME in. I caught a stray thought from her that sent pain and sickness and futility through me. A thought of sadness and pity for me as she looked at me.

I backed toward the wall. I thought hard, hard, and the wall opened for me. A second of joyous power gave way to despair. I didn't belong here; I didn't belong anywhere now. What if I should kill Durach? And then what if I went back to the Third Plane?

What then? I wouldn't fit there either. I'd still keep some of the power, I knew that. I'd be an ESP freak then, probably working in some televised vaudishow. And I couldn't stay here, I thought, because I hadn't developed normally. I'd been artifically developed so that I could go through the Barrier hadn't I?

I was nobody; I was nowhere. I didn't have a name anymore, not really. These supermen weren't my kind either.

Carleth pointed toward the City. "Durach's there," I heard him whisper. And Reeta's eyes were wet with sorrow as she came toward me.

I didn't want to see her anymore, or feel her hands on me; I didn't wait for anything else. One thing I knew as I went through the wall and started down the beautiful still street:

I would kill Durach, and then I'd be finished. I tried to ignore the screams in the village, tried not to see the people dying around me.

I still carried that neutron gun Malcolm Mergon had given me. It had come through the barrier too.

Carleth's and Reeta's thoughts drifted after me: "We can give you some protection. A constant stream of mind-energy shielding. We'll stay with you, as closely as possible.

"Durach is there, in the tallest building in the City."

I looked back. Reeta stood in the center of the village by the foun-

tain, waving. I didn't wave back. I knew that my smile was bitter. And then I concentrated as much as I could on the flat metal disc that came out at me from the wall of the bubble with a humming of delicate electronic power. I sat on it. I thought: "I'd like to be on my way to the City. To the City."

I was outside the bubble. I was high above the surface of Mohln, with the quickness of thought. And I was—high!

It was like a splash of white light under me, the moon shining on that wonderful world. I looked ahead toward those giant spires of that colossal city. Built for ten men, ten freaks. A city of thought.

That one tower stuck up half again as high as the rest of the City. A blue dangerous looking light shone from its top. There wasn't any use drawing this appointment out, I thought. And a fast appearance might give me an advantage of surprise, if I had any advantage at all, and I doubted that.

"There," I thought, "is where I want to be next. On top of that building, facing Durach. *Now!*"

And I was there.

5

Remember Me?

DURACH was waiting for me. Not LeStrang; nothing that looked like LeStrang. This was the real Durach, and he was not something you would want to see a second time, nor anything you would care to remember, if you could help it.

He wasn't human; he was a monster, a freak. Yet, he looked much like anyone else. It was the inside of him that was so different.

Durach wasn't alone as I found myself standing there before him. Two women and several men were in the big arched room with him. None of them were any more pleasant on the inside than Durach. Jelahn's dive on the North Canal seemed like the memory of an anti-room to paradise compared with the feeling in this room of Durach's.

It was filthy and obscene, and it made me mad; it made me shaking mad to think that a chance thing like these freaks had been sent into the Fourth Stage world of Mohln where they didn't belong, to contaminate it, and bring hate and destruction and death to a world that had put a few men at least on the edge of marvelous super life.

Durach was bigger than he had been in the personality of LeStrang, a personality he had given to people by suggestion. He was on a couch of bright red that seemed to writhe under him. Durach was a fat white man with white hair, his fat wrapped up in a tight-fitting shiny stuff like resensilk. His face was soft and his eyes wide and bland and blue. Pale jowls hung over his collar on either side, and under his beaked nose was a small, pursed, red button of a mouth.

Silly little mouth, I thought. I wanted to laugh at it, but I didn't; I couldn't laugh. I couldn't do much of anything except stand there and try to figure out what I was really doing here—wherever I was.

The women and men around the room looked at me, very silently, terribly curious, and far away. Durach's little red mouth smiled at me. No one said anything. They just thought—about the ways I could look dead—and about the many ways it was possible for me to become dead—ways that can take so long.

And there were other thoughts pounding at my skull. They were laughing at me; they were feeling sorry for me, and they were thinking I was an idiot, at least.

I felt like a silly little mortal suddenly brought before a bunch of wicked gods. And then it hit me—

That's just about what I was!

I was scared. My mind seemed covered with a cold twisted shadow. Winds I couldn't see seemed to sweep and cry and thunder through that giant room. And I could feel power, great stores of controlled power, churning and boiling and ready to explode around me.

No one moved. I saw the great ro-

tary convertors spinning away beside banks and banks of transformers, and grid oscillators. Machinery, and it was running and developing power, but it seemed unreal, foggy, as though I was seeing it through a curtain of fog.

Well, I knew that this great room contained the Merger that Durach had built. Durach was a freak, both Third and Fourth stage. He was utilizing both fields in a mad kind of fusion. He was mad, beyond the mental reach of sane Fourth Stage minds. That was understandable.

Fourth Stage minds, combined, could control some part of the Merger by mental energy, so that Durach couldn't use it. But Fourth Stage minds were being killed off by another gadget Durach and his freaks had made.

The Merger—a big gadget channeling unknown electronic force partly by mind-energy. This Merger could hit hard at a man's entire nervous system and his mind, and force it back to Third Stage awareness, or step it up so that Third Stage reality faded away, and the Fourth became reality.

But I knew this was phony. It was like the old methods of shock treatment for the insane. The methods were wrong, and the results might be harmful, and unpredictable.

Then Durach laughed, and he was laughing at me; his laughter burned and roared inside my skull.

I blinked and gasped out something as I jerked the neutron gun from my pocket and pointed it for the second time at his belly.

I KNEW I was talking, but my voice didn't sound like mine; it didn't sound like anybody's voice. "This time I do it, Durach. You can't go through the Barrier to get away from me now. The Merger machinery, you can't use it. Carleth's people have you blocked, Durach."

Durach's little red mouth stretched at me. He purred. "What do you want to kill *me* for?"

A woman in the corner laughed. It was like somebody had sprayed dry ice through the room.

I said. "I'm not wasting time talking, Durach. I'm killing you because —because—"

Durach laughed again. "Because you've been told to by a bunch of humanitarian perfectionists obsessed with their own vague destinies! Because you think you want to save the Third Plane—a dismal unreal blind world where people shamble like cattle and peer into continuous fog like moles! Is that why you want to kill me?"

I knew I'd have to do it now, fast, or I'd never be able to. I tried to press the trigger back. I knew that Durach couldn't stop me, not by any physical means. They had no weapons; they didn't need any, to deal with the Fourth Stage people in their own plane. They had mental-shattering gadgets, but none of them could work on me. I wasn't built like the other Fourth Stage people. I wasn't built like anyone now. I was a special job, made to get Durach, and that was all.

"You know the reasons you've been told and made to follow," Durach smiled. "You're the big sucker, as you think you are, Berton. You're beginning to see the truth now; you're beginning to realize why they can't touch me—why they had to get *you* to do it."

I tried to fire the gun. The air seemed to get hot and smoky around me with conflicting thoughts. I knew there was a battle going on—a fight of mind-energy. But I wasn't a part of it. It was between Durach and his freaks, and Carleth and Reeta and whoever was left of their kind. A fight for control of the Merger.

I tried to fire, but I couldn't; I wanted to hear what Durach had to say. I knew it was something that might mean a lot to me. I shouldn't want to listen; I had my job. I—

I felt like knives were stabbing me. I was shivering and sweating. I could feel my face growing wet and gray and lips quivering. I was about finished and I knew it. And I knew

that if I did anything, I'd have to do it quick.

No physical weapons. What trap would they use against me, what unknown forces?

I felt my lips move, and heard my own tortured, sobbing cries.

"I'll tell you, Berton," Durach laughed. "They can't kill me. But you can. Why? Because you're like us, Berton! They have no more real respect for you than for the rest of us here in this room. You're just a tool they're using, and when they're through, you'll go back into the garbage dumps of Third Plane sickness.

"Berton—you're just another freak, like us!"

I felt blinded. I forced my eyes to hold him in sight as I tried to fire. I moved toward him; the room was large, and I kept walking, listening to him.

"But we're bigger than they are, because we're freaks, Berton. We're natural freaks, you might say. Mal and Glora created a freak out of you so you would come through the Barrier. But we're all freaks, neither Third or Fourth Stage—*but the strongest talents of both planes are in us!*

"They can't move back from Fourth to Third Plane after having once left the Fourth. They can't destroy anything with their paraphysical power, Berton. That's their weakness. But we can. They call us insane. But use your own intelligence! What do you think?"

I kept walking toward his voice, toward that shifting smoky outline. Sweat made a stream down my throat. I was sick and blinded.

"They're asking you to give it all up, just for their fanatical belief in some sort of abstract destiny for all humanity. *Immortality!* Think of it, Berton! And then you can go on and on, through higher and higher stages of reality. Reach heights of experience the greatest dreamers have never touched.

"We'll be gods, Berton! They want to do it by slow and ponderous evolution, and play at chance to become gods. They call us freaks—because we've found the short cut to eternal greatness.

"Mutation, that's one way. You got it another way, thanks to them. But from now on, it can be our show, Berton.

"They want to hold us back, using Third Stage people as pacers. They want to destroy us, because we're superior. They want Third Stage reality, with its disease, its blindness and its million incurable sicknesses to go on being a burden to the realization of Fourth Stage greatness, holding it back, drawing its entropic rate down to zero.

"Listen, Berton! If we destroy the Third Plane, the energy release will speed up the entropic rate of Fourth Plane development a billion fold. You can be one of us. A part of it. And why not? We're mutations. You got through the barrier because they changed your nervous system and consciousness by synthetic methods. But you're like us. You're a freak too, Berton.

"You're fighting on the wrong side. You're destroying—yourself!"

TIME, MOVEMENT, sight, everything seemed to freeze as I stood there. There was Durach and the others, like pale statues in a dream. Then I felt other minds and other eyes around me. Reeta! Carleth!

I saw them. It was like a dream look at a forgotten room, and people almost forgotten; their voices, like stillness beyond a threshold I had once crossed.

She said, her eyes sad and wet. "The decision must be yours, Ray Berton. We can give you the support of what paraphysical energy we have left within us. But we can't destroy directly; you must do that. In that way, you're different from us, but you're not a freak like Durach and these others. You have temporary Fourth Stage awareness. At a given time, that awareness will fade, and you'll go back to Third Stage reality, and be as you were before, with no memory of this world. Destroy him, Berton. *Now! Now!"*

My eyes were shut. I felt like I was falling. "You're gods," I sobbed at them. "I'm still human. You're asking too much. How can I decide? I could be like them—greater than you. And you want me to give it up, go back to—" I thought of it. The stinking disease of Jelahn's tavern, and the girl—

I laughed a little then, and in that laugh was a crazy climbing note of fear and madness and not-knowing. Go back to that, when—

"There are only five of us left now," Reeta said. "Durach's feelers have killed the rest of us. We can't hold the Merger against him but a few seconds longer, Berton."

I thought of the outer planets where I'd always lived. The disease and the cold, the sadistic cops, the taverns with rotten women, minds eaten away with *krin-krin.*

"You picked me wrong," I yelled wildly. "You don't get heros from where I came from. Like Durach said —he's more my kind. We could be like gods. Immortal—how can I—"

I felt mind-energy, paraphysical power, flow into me from Reeta and Carleth. They told me something, a word — extratemporal — new perception that could let me see things that would happen! Space factors disappeared, for one terrible second. The factor of future time faded—*and I could see!*

I felt it. Hot and horrible and final. A flash of future knowledge. I saw Earth disappear into a great white flame. And where it had been was a white hot nova in black space.

Horror rose like a volcano of madness, and a sheet of pain seemed to split my head wide open.

"No," I felt Durach's roaring thought. "No, Berton! They're giving you a false impression. That's a probability varient of Earth's future. They've let you see the Earth destroyed—but it's a different variant than what will happen if you join us. By destroying the Third Plane my way, we can save Fourth Stage reality from destruction—but their way —all will be destroyed!"

"It's your choice," Reeta said. "We have only a few flashes of time left, and then it won't matter anymore."

Maybe I didn't make any decision, not consciously. The pressure was too much for me. I had to do something, anything. I heard myself screaming as I pressed the trigger of the gun.

Durach fell beneath its power beam. It sprayed and burned and roared in the great room. He came around the desk as I turned; his white face had turned gray with a coat of wet over it. I felt the sudden complete effort within all of them as they tried to get me.

Freaks. But there wasn't much physical difference between these people and the average looking group. It was the inside of them that was different. Differences in metabolism, neural structure, conscious awareness...a lot more...

Durach and the others were surging in toward me. Walls of mind-energy throbbed around me. Their faces were twisted with hate and fear.

"Berton! You can know immortality, perfection, omnipotence! Don't sacrifice your life for a cause already lost according to that vision you had of the future! You know the conditions on the Third Plane! They have conquered a part of atomic power, but their Third Stage mentalities will never develop fast enough to keep that power from destroying them. Them and us too! That's the probability variant of a future that will happen anyway—unless we destroy the Third Stage now, in a way that will let this higher reality go on, unburdened!

"EARTH *WILL destroy itself anyway, Berton. Let us save ourselves!*" My legs wouldn't hold me anymore. I was on my knees. I tried to lift the gun again.

"It's your choice, Berton," Reeta said. Now her thought and her voice was weaker, faraway, dying. "Remember—Durach's insane."

Insane? Insane by what judgment? It was relative. Who—?

Durach's final argument was the most convincing; nobody wants to

die. "It means death for you, Berton, if you kill me. This city, this tower we're on top of—it exists because I will it to exist! This tower is two miles high, Berton! Kill me, and the tower will crumble from under you. You'll fall—fall, Berton! Remember, your Fourth Stage capacity is only temporary. When you kill me, your work for them will be done. You'll automatically start to return to Third Plane existence.

"You could control your fall here, with Fourth stage energy. But kill me, and you'll find yourself back in Third Stage reality—two miles above the Earth! And nothing under you but death—that'll be your reward for saving Earth for a little while longer, Berton! You want to live!"

Far, far away, I felt Reeta and Carleth, still trying to help me. Sure, a man wants to live. That Marty in Jelahn's tavern, he wanted to live. Millions of people on Earth, they wanted to live, wanted to try to make it work. No man wants to die.

There are some ways no man cares to live.

I fired the gun, fired it point blank into Durach's chest, then moved it around over the others.

There was blinding white light. And Durach and his kind stopped living. They went back to some other energy form, a kind that would never cause anyone any more trouble.

I knew then that Durach had been right, in one respect anyway; when he died, the tower died. I felt it melting away around me as the mind-energy that had created it started to fade away. I felt that awful emptiness opening under me. And—this is funny—I felt like a little boy who's done something he thinks is pretty good and pretty big. But no one knows he's done anything, and he feels hurt, and he wants people to know.

I wanted people to know. I didn't want what I'd done, and everything that had happened and might happen, to be lost to people. It wouldn't be fair. Reeta and Carleth knew what I was thinking. I felt their thoughts coming back again, stronger, and stronger and growing, and joyous.

Reeta—Carleth—help me.

I don't want to be forgotten.

SOMEHOW, they were holding me with them, but I knew they couldn't do it very much longer. Around me was a gray billowing fog, and I was starting to fall through it—

Reeta and Carleth will stay here with Fourth Stage power; they are all right now. Durach's finished, and they have the merger back in their power completely now, and can use it for constructive purposes, or not at all. It doesn't matter. I've done my job. The danger's gone.

But I want people to know.

They're telling me to concentrate. They'll help me, but I must hurry, hurry. I've still some of the power, and they'll help me. Mind-energy. Matter changed from one form to another by thought. MY thought and theirs, together. Telurgy. Everything's made from the same stuff, only the electronic patterns are different. So we're willing patterns to change. We change some of the patterns of elements around me to another arrangement—into a metal scroll, my story to you, my thoughts of all that has happened, and what I've done. So you'll remember.

And they'll send it through the Barrier by the Merger.

What I'm thinking now as this tower and this city fades around me, it will all be on that metal for you to read. Maybe they could still save me, someway, but they can't because I guess I don't really want to go back to being a Third Stage guy.

I'm not like Glora and Malcolm, willing to give up so much, for a cause. After playing god, I can't go back to drinking *krin-krin* in Jelahn's tavern on the North Canal of Mars.

I'd rather die this way.

Durach said you'd blow up Earth and this higher reality too, with atomic power, because you wouldn't be able to learn to think enough to control it. Reeta and Carleth said Durach was insane, that he was wrong.

I don't know; I hope they were

[*Turn To Page 95*]

Be Young Again!

★ FEATURE NOVEL ★

by Murray Leinster

(author of "Nobody Saw The Ship")

"Can't you picture how Vachti will fall for this Elixer of Youth proposition? He'll see himself young, surrounded by pretty girls. . ."





(illustration by Lawrence)

Just about every confidence gag had been tried on old Vachti, except the Elixer of Youth. Only this was different — Professor Barr had a unique pitch on it, but Buck had the real goods!

ME AND a guy named Hermes Trismigestus take care of the situation when Jode gets in a very tight place. This guy Trismigestus is anyways a thousand years old, if he's alive anywhere, and I am sixteen, but we co-

operate. The tight place is caused by Prof Henry Barr, who urgent regrets the matter later on, and by Mr. Vachti, who is an elderly bootlegger baron in the dear dead days; he still has bodyguards hanging around him bloodthirsty. If you think an old guy like Mr. Vachti can't figure in a tight place—he's got some tough-looking goons around and a yacht and a private island estate and other trimmings—all I got to say is you never met Mr. Vachti.

Old Jode gets into it because he thinks it will top off his career. Pride. He is the party who once worked a handkerchief-switch on Ma Mandelbaum, who I understand was the biggest lady fence in the world in her day, and wasn't to be swindled by an amateur. He also once sells a gold brick to the United States Mint in Denver, Colorado. And once he persuades the police department of a certain fair city that he is a Fed man with a tip-off on a bank robbery that is gonna take place. He has every cop in town ambushed around that bank that night, while he lurks inside with a tommy-gun, waiting for the bold bad burglers that never arrive. He acts much embarrassed next morning.

But a coupla days later the liquid assets of the bank turn up in the mail addressed to him, because he has spent those long hours packing them neat in Manilla envelopes and mailing them in the mail-slot that is in the bank for the convenience of depositors. But, still, Jode feels that taking Mr. Vachti over the hurdles will crown his career. Mr. Vachti was a very big shot once, when his business staff included not only income-tax men and tommy-gun experts, but also gentlemen who specialize in putting people in barrels of concrete and dumping them in the Chicago River.

I meet old Jode when I am thumbing a ride towards the Coast. I have beat it from what you might call home after my old man works me over with a chair for spending money I earn on a gas-engine for a model aeroplane instead of giving it to him to get drunk on. I am not making out so good at hitch-hiking, because, being sixteen and not looking any older, I hafta dodge truant officers everywhere. But I get by; I fix a car-radio for a guy at a fillin'-station while old Jode is having his gas-tank filled up, and the guy says swell and gives me a half a buck. The job I done would cost him twelve sixty at a regular repair-shop. I says, "I could do with a lift to Phoenix," but the guy isn't going that way. Then old Jode wheezes cordial that he is, so I climb in his car.

He is fat and old and has danglin' red wattles, and he looks like he is made of money and hasn't a care in the world. Outside of havin' the cops of sixteen or eighteen states passionate interested in his whereabouts, he doesn't have no worries, and lookin' like a million dollars is his business. But I don't know that then; he talks to me cordial, and we get on to science, a subject in which he is interested but don't know beans about.

With him asking questions, grunting and respectful, I tell him the theoretic perfect fuel for space-ships, and the difference between a rocket and a jet, and what the Doppler effect is, and what's the difference between Oak Ridge and Hansford, Wash. I'm not showing off, you know; I explain that I read a lot of science magazines and he'd ought to try them. Special the science-fiction ones. And I tell him I'm headed for the Coast to get a job in a radio repair shop, like I had back home after school and Saturdays, and I'm going to save up and have a private experimental laboratory. I got some ideas—science-fiction ideas—that I think I can make work out actual.

Old Jode gets thoughtful. Later on when I know him better I will know what that means. Right then, though, when he beams and says he would like to play a joke on a friend, and I seem a handy young man with tools, I just say modest that I'm pretty fair. He makes me a proposition. He'll stake me to grub and hotel expenses and a suit of clothes, and say I'm his nephew, if I'll fix

him a trick television cabinet with a movie sound projector inside so he can fool a friend into thinkin' he's got a long-distance receiver that'll pick up from anywhere. I can do that with my hands tied behind my back; I take him up quick. I improve the idea; I suggest color-film, which will look like three-color television in action.

MR. VACHTI don't have anything to do with this deal. Neither does the Prof, who at that time is fumbling happy with a swell idea that he don't know how good it is. This is Phoenix, Arizona. So old Jode buys the stuff I say is needed—he acts like he is made of money—and I put it together in the hotel-room he gets for me next to his. It's a swell hotel, the best in town, and I eat fancy grub that I don't know the names of, being you have to order it in French. When the job's finished I figure on thumbing my way further, but old Jode says perish the thought. He will put me on salary as his technical assistant.

He waddles around town, wheezing and busy, while I catch up on my science reading. I'm knee-deep in magazines when he comes tiptoeing into the room and says joyous that his joke worked and he's beating it before his friend gets wise. So we light out, and he chuckles happy all the way up to Sun Valley—which is considerable of a ride—where he says he would like to rest a few days. When I get to know him better I find out that he shows what was apparently three-color television to some sharp business men in Phoenix; they get together and pull a fast business deal on him, and swindle him excessive by paying him only twenty thousand bucks for all rights in a epoch-making discovery. Which when they find out they been stuck they can't say a word, because their methods are at least unethical if not illegal.

Old Jode soaks up sun and fancier grub than ever at Sun Valley, which is a very swank place indeed, but I get restless. Then one day he comes in chucklin' and says that he will have great fun with his friend the president of Western Power if I can contrive something that looks like it is a receiver of beamed or wireless power, and can it be done? I says it will be phoney but if he wants a laugh, okay. So I make a set with a coupla thyratron tubes and this and that and it looks just like a science-fiction illustration. But the power it delivers so impressive comes from storage-batteries built in the work-bench it's built on.

I would like to see him play his joke, but he says no. I sneak a look in the window, anyhow, and I get the picture. I don't hear the actual dealing, but Western Power pays him plenty for full ownership of the gadget, with the agreement that they are going to smash it right where it sets and try not to have bad dreams about what it would do to their business.

We leave Sun Valley with old Jode on top of the world and beaming at me affectionate. I have got wise, now, and I talk to him stern. He is upset, but he tells me the story of his life—he gets proud of it as he goes along—with all about how he pulls the handkerchief-switch on Ma Mandelbaum, and the gold brick on the Denver Mint, and all the rest. It is a very adventurous career he describes, and it even has glamour. Then he promises that if I stay on as his technical assistant I can have a private experimental laboratory of my own, and he will leave me in the clear in all dealings. So I settle down to planning what I'm gonna have and how I'm going to use it. I expect to set up my laboratory in Las Lagunas, where we are heading.

LAS LAGUNAS is another swank place, with all the bills-of-fare in French and the prices lookin' like Army-Navy estimates. I send for lab-supply catalogs and start hunting for a place to set up shop. Then Jode—who has been circulating social, wheezing happy and contagious—says apprehensive that I better not plan on a lab here, because we may

have to move. I ask why. He says he has met Mr. Vachti, and to top off his career he has got an ambition to put over a fast one on him. After that, he says, he will retire and devote the rest of his life to supervising my education.

I am not keen on having my education supervised, but Jode explains that Mr. Vachti is the one guy who has put it over on everybody, and nobody has ever put anything over on him. He is famous from prohibition days. He even beats the income-tax rap the Feds try to pin on him when they despair of linking him with missing persons they think are in barrels of concrete at the bottom of the Chicago River. Mr. Vachti is completely surrounded by lawyers and personal physicians; he is seventy and keeps his old body-guards out of sentiment, wears dark spectacles, and has a most unpleasant hobby. He owns a yacht, an island, and several million dollars, but his hobby is getting people to try to swindle him and then sending them to jail. He is very respectable now, says Jode, and a good many artistic swindlers have worked on him, but he does not appreciate their artistry. It is a challenge, says old Jode. It will be something to remember in his declining years, Jode says, if he nicks Mr. Vachti for a roll and gets away with it. If I will postpone my laboratory until he is through with Mr. Vachti, he will buy me a eighteen-foot sailboat that I can have personal, and I can loaf around in it while business goes on.

I make the deal. The price of my laboratory is climbing as I think of more things I would like to have. I figure if Jode gets rich enough, maybe I can nick him for a small-sized cyclotron and have some fun. Meanwhile a sailboat won't be bad.

I get it. I do have fun. I have never heard of Hermes Trismigestus; I have never heard of Paracelsus, or Dr. Dee, or Dr. Faustus, or Nicholas Flamel, or any of those guys. I have never heard of Prof Henry Barr. But I learn to sail my boat pretty good and I am happy planning my laboratory.

But old Jode loses his carefree look; he gets absent-minded and fretful. One day he confides his woes to me. "I am afraid," he wheezes pathetic, "that I am losing my grip, Buck. I know Mr. Vachti well. We are on confidential terms. He thinks I am a retired banker, and he has confided to me all about his hobby, and tells me with grim amusement about the various sucker-baits he has been invited to fall for. And I cannot contrive a scheme to offer him! Every type of enterprise the mind of man can invent has been tried on him! The most refined of financial shenannigans have failed! He is on to everything!"

I say, "Yeah?" I would like to be helpful; that laboratory is going to cost money. A electron-telescope ain't cheap. I need for Jode to be prosperous to keep his promise.

"He has opened his files to me," says Jode, wrinklin' up his fat face like a baby tryin' not to cry. "All the games he has pretended to fall for, with the news clippings of the trials and sentencing of the operators! He even has the records of the parole board hearings on them, and how he has protested the freeing of such criminals. That file is most informative. There are a coupla twists that even I never heard of before. The greatest artists in the business have worked on him, Buck! It would be a artistic triumph to diddle him. Indeed, I could not rest easy in my grave without havin' a try at him!"

"I bet," I says, "that if he ever does fall, it will be for somethin' a three-year-old would laugh at."

I don't know why I say it, but Jode's mouth drops open. He blinks at me, and suddenly he begins to wheeze happy again. "Genius!" he says. "That's the trick! Now I start hunting for the oldest, stalest, most impossible trick in the world! Somethin' so old and phoney nobody would think of tryin' it. I think, Buck, that as my technical assistant you show genius!"

He struts out, a fat little guy with sporty clothes who looks like a retired banker without a worry in the world. And around this time a new

crop of science magazines appears on the newsstands; I buy the lot of 'em and loaf around in my sailboat, readin' 'em and making plans.

2

ONE WEEK passes, and two. Then Jode tells me he wants me to have dinner, formal, with a Prof Henry Barr whom he has contacted because he's got a hunch that the Prof has maybe the scheme he is looking for. The Prof had an advertisement in the paper. It reads:

> I have made an unconventional scientific discovery that I do not know how to develop commercially. An entrepreneur or financial adviser with some money is sought. Address Biologist, Box 711 care this paper.

"It's crude," says Jode, helpful. "It wouldn't get a nibble from real money. All he could hope for would be a sure-thing player or a legal counseller tryin' for a long-shot cut. I have invited him to dinner. In prosperous surroundings he will be excited and probably spill his hand. You will pass on the plausibility of his scientific discovery. It is one of the things I pay you for."

Well—I play up. I am passing for Jode's nephew in the very swank surroundings of Las Lagunas, where Jode's and my hotel-suite costs more money per day than I ever hoped to make a week. I prefer hanging around in my sailboat, reading science-fiction and planning my laboratory, but I get combed up and put on a snazzy suit Jode has bought me; we meet this Prof and Jode waddles grand into the hotel dining-room. They have cocktails and I have a coke and then the business starts.

Old Jode eats his oysters, noisy and with gusto, and wipes his mouth. "I was—hrrrm—much interested in your advertisement, Professor Barr," he wheezes. "It is a beautiful approach. However, I will bet cash money that you didn't get a single answer besides mine worth your talents."

"True," admits the Prof. He is a dignified but seedy-looking guy with long white whiskers. He strokes them reflective. "I had a number of replies, but few of them suggested financial responsibility."

The waiter serves the soup. Jode sniffs at it and beams. "The chef here," he says, "makes soup which is almost music— What have you got, Professor?"

The Prof begins his spiel, dignified. "Why," he says, profound, "I had better explain that I was Professor of Medieval History at Perkins College for thirty-five years. I was released because a wealthy alumnus offered to add to the endowment if a son-in-law of his was taken on the faculty and his habit of getting drunk frequently was ignored. I had to be released so the college could take advantage of the offer."

"Hrrrrm," says Jode. "My sympathies, sir."

"I do not blame them," says the Prof, resigned, "but I shall never again practice teaching as a profession... The point is that in my studies of medieval history I naturally came across many mentions of alchemy. The alchemists, you are doubtless aware, searched for the Philosopher's Stone to turn base metal into gold; for an Alkahest to dissolve all known substances; and they searched for the Elixir of Youth. I planned to write a scholarly treatise on the contributions of alchemy—gunpowder, metallic tinctures in medicine, sulphuric acid, and all the foundations of chemistry. But as I studied the source-material, I found the reports of their work singularly convincing."

Jode looks at me. I nod. Something like this hasta be the truth. Sure! Astronomy started with fortune-telling. Chemistry must have had as crazy a beginning. I nod emphatic.

"It has been pointed out," says the Prof, profound, "that if one set a million monkeys at a million typewriters and kept them pounding away at random, by the mere operation of the laws of chance one of those monkeys would ultimately rewrite the Smyth Report on Atomic Energy. And it is easy to calculate that during the Middle Ages there were enough alchemists making ex-

periments practically at random to produce outstanding discoveries by sheer happenchance. Some of these discoveries we know. I have mentioned them. But I have proof that they made others."

OLD JODE leans back in his chair. This is the oldest of all known swindles. It is worn out long before the first gold brick is made. Old Jode is astounded at his good fortune; this is perfect for Mr. Vachti, who has never been put through the wringer by any person whatsoever.

"Hrrrrrrm!" says old Jode. "Pray go on, sir!"

"Some three years back," says the Prof, "I took the money I had intended to use for my summer sustenance, and duplicated the alchemical process described by Dr. Dee for the production of the Alkahest—the Universal Solvent. It began with icelandic spar, or calcium fluoride. The intervening processes were absurd. But as a result I achieved a liquid which turned out to be hydrofluoric acid—the acid which is now used for etching glass, and which is so nearly a universal solvent that it can be retained in fleuro-carbon plastic bottles."

I perk up my ears. Old Jode sees my face. He grunts: "Interestin'. Pray continue!"

The waiter serves some *boef a Marechal Chateaubriand*. Jode drools. He begins to stoke himself steady.

"I had proved one alchemical discovery true," says the Prof. "The Philosopher's Stone."

Old Jode chokes. He says, pained: "Not a process to make gold! Please, Prof—"

"The Philosopher's Stone," says the Prof, stern, "may have been achieved. But when metals are transmuted the energy-release is tremendous; it is atomic energy. When uranium is changed into boron and such, an atomic bomb is the result. The manufacture of gold would involve highly lethal radiation in vast quantities. I did not attempt to duplicate the Philosopher's Stone!"

"That's better," says Jode, relieved.

"But," says the Prof, "I did—at great and crippling expense to myself—repeat Hermes Trismigestus' process for making the Elixir of Youth. And it worked."

Old Jode looks, blinks, and then he begins to kinda glow with happiness, inside and out. This is the oldest swindle on earth. It goes back to before history. It is so cold and so worn-out that it is undoubtedly the only one that ain't been tried on Mr. Vachti—and for a bloodthirsty old guy now gloomily hangin' on around seventy, it is the one bait that he would like to believe in if he could.

"Remarkable!" wheezes Jode. "You have experimental evidence, of course?"

"I beggared myself procurin' the materials," says the Prof, apologetic. "Modern chemicals will not work. One must use the impure, the sometimes ridiculous chemicals of the ancients. It is possible that the very impurities are the essential ingredients. But at the cost of all my savings, I made ten cubic centimetres of yellow fluid. I tried a bit of it on an ancient rat from the biology department at Perkins. It worked—too well. Much too well! So I—ah—I was forced to experiment for the proper dosage. One cubic centimetre of the yellow fluid—the elixir—it developed, would restore a twenty-pound animal to early maturity. Seven to ten centimetres would be required for an adult human being. But I had to expend eight cubic centimetres to verify this fact in my experiments on small animals. I have only two centimetres left. But I do have a number of very elderly rats at my dwelling. I will let you choose any one of them; I will administer the elixir, and allow you to take the animal away and care for it. In three days it will be a young rat again."

"Such evidence would be unquestionable," beams Jode. "How much?"

"Eh?" says the Prof, startled.

"You need the Elixir yourself," says Jode, grunting amiable. "You

are broke. If somebody will finance the makin' of an adequate supply for you, you will make enough for him, too. You see, I am saving you the trouble of makin' the pitch. And I say again, how much?"

The Prof's eyes gleam. He wets his lips. Jode says confidential. "I am a customer. I can fetch in another—a very rich man. If I finance the operation myself, will you split with me what I get outa him? Your split will be in five figures. Maybe more."

"I—ah—when I am a young man again," admits the Prof, "it would be a very good idea to have some capital with which to start life anew. Er—yes, I will agree to that."

Jode asks questions, fast, and peels off century-notes like he was dealing a hand for set-back. He is hooked; he is beaming. All during the rest of dinner he wheezes and snorts happy to himself.

AFTER THE Prof has gone away, old Jode says scornful that he is strictly a small-time operator, and he doubts if he ever took over a customer for as much as a grand in all his life. But he figures Prof is ripe for plenty more than this first installment, which is what Jode wants. Up in our rooms, he is still grinning with all his chins and wattles.

"A lovely business, eh, Buck? Convincin', too! Can't you picture how Vachti will fall for this Elixer of Youth proposition? He'll see himself young, surrounded by pretty girls..."

"I know of a coupla science-fiction writers coulda done it better," I say, detached. "But it's good enough. It would take a good man to find a hole in that theory. In fact, it would prob'ly work."

"Huh?" says Jode.

"It would prob'ly work," I repeat, firm. "That catalyst stuff is good reasonin'. I knew a fella got fired from a silverplatin' plant and he took a file and filed off some powdered bakelite into each one of the platin' baths to get even. The firm near went crazy. The bakelite don't dissolve or anything, but you can't plate when it's in the bath. It's a antioatalyst. Some of those impurities the Prof was talking about must keep the regular chemical actions from takin' place, so you get what he said."

Old Jode sits down and howls.

"That stuff about the million monkeys is true," I point out. "I read that myself in a science magazine. I got a hunch there's more to his idea than he figures. If my laboratory was set up I'd try it myself. Maybe I better had, anyways."

"Buck!" wheezes old Jode. "You'll be the death of me!"

He near strangles, laughin'. I get mad. "Okay," I say, "but I tell you right now you better let me do it if you sure-enough want that elixir. Icelandic spar ain't what he said. He's got good dope, but he's a phoney!"

Old Jode thinks that's so funny I go out and take a walk to cool off. But the more I think about it, the better the Prof's stuff looks. Next day I go to the public library and hunt up alchemy. I get a bunch of books out in the reading-room. Trismigestus. Bacon. Theophrastus. Paracelsus. Count Graby. I read them, fast, taking notes when necessary. I get fascinated; the stuff sounds plenty convincing. I get excited. It's as good as some science fiction. I fill my head up with the stuff, and a note-book with memos.

I go to a drug-store and buy some test-tubes. I get a alcohol-burner and some denatured; I go to a paint store and buy some more stuff. I have to hunt high and low before I can find a hobby-shop with geological specimens. I get some stuff there. Fluor-spar. The clerk sells it to me indifferent. Plenty of guys my age mess around with experiments; I get everything I need, except some egg-skin.

I go back to the hotel, lock the door and put the stuff together. I have not got pure chemicals. A hunk of native sulphur. I catch some soot from safety matches that I burn one after another under a metal ash-tray. I've got a hunk of sal-ammoniac—lump stuff, not what they sell at a drugstore. Nobody will sell me oil

of vitriol, but I get some at a garage where they have it for storage batteries. I got some iron pyrites. I mix the stuff up careful. It makes an awful stink. I have to open the windows. I go through all the routine that a guy named Dr. Dee says would make a universal solvent. Nothing happens. Nothing at all.

I am pretty much disgusted. The Prof's stuff sounded good. If I'd read it in a science magazine I would've believed it and remembered it. But nothing happens. Next morning I am having breakfast when I remember about the skin of a egg. That is crazy. It ain't scientific; not modern scientific, anyhow. But I go upstairs with a egg-shell from breakfast. I get out that thin skin from inside and put it in the test-tube. Nothing happens.

I get disgusted all over again. I sit down with a science magazine, and I am reading it morbid, when I smell something funny. The test-tube is empty. There is a little white vapor around the bottom. There is a hole in the test-tube; there is a hole in the sink; there is a hole in the floor underneath. It stinks something awful. I don't know how far down the hole goes, but I know I got to get a laboratory and work this business out!

I TELL old Jode about it. I show him the hole in the floor and the sink. He turns funny colors. "You mighta made poison gas, Buck!" he says. "You coulda killed yourself! It coulda been poison!"

"It wasn't whipping cream," I agree. "It's what those alchemists said they got. I got my doubts the Prof ever did this experiment, even if he said he did. You better let me fix up a temporary laboratory and make that elixir for you."

But Jode looks pained. "Buck," he says, "I have sounded out Mr. Vachti. I have explained that I have been softened up on this business. I have acted dumb so he thinks I have fallen for it. He is checking up; you got to stay out of this party!"

"But the Prof ain't going to make the real stuff!" I say, grim. "I'll bet —what kinda apparatus is he buyin'?"

Jode shows me a list. He is fat and white-haired an very impressive to look at, but when it comes to science he has to take my word for things. I say, scornful: "Phoney! I hunted up Hermes Trismigestus in the library yesterday and got the formula. That vacuum distillation apparatus ain't going to be used! It's just to dress up the lab."

"It's wrong, eh?" says Jode.

"It's crazy!" I says. "Just good apparatus wasted!"

"Fine!" says Jode, relieved. "I didn't think he believed it himself; if he wasn't a crook I'd be messed up. But he's still got me worried. How's he gonna pull that trick of makin' rats young again, Buck? Mr. Vachti wants to see that—him handling the rats. If the Prof is smart enough to put that over, Mr. Vachti is hooked!"

"If *I* wanted to do it," I says, scornful, "I'd put some rats on short grub an' castor oil and get 'em thin. Then I'd powder their fur to make 'em gray, and probably get a vet to give me something' to make 'em off their feed and languid. They'd look plenty old! And all they'd need to get young again would be two or three days of good eatin' an' no castor oil."

"Genius!", says Jode, beaming at me affectionate. "You take a load off my shoulders. Tomorrow Mr. Vachti and me we look over the rats and I bet you got the trick exact. The Prof is mighty cagey with his two centimetres of stuff."

"Better let me make it for you real," I say, warning.

"You stay outa this!" grunts Jode, scared again when he thinks of that hole in the sink and the floor. "And don't go mixing up any more poisons, hear me?"

He is honest worried. He ain't a bad guy; he's a crook, of course, but in his way he's all right. Right now he's paying for me to stay at a plenty swank hotel, passin' for my uncle—which keeps me outa truant-officer trouble—and he tries earnest to make me appreciate *souffle marin avec pate de fois gras* as superior to the hot dogs I eat a lot more frequent. But he is firm about me not making

any more experiments.

Well, I can handle that. I got a sailboat, ain't I? I fix up a locker with a padlock, and I start accumulatin' materials, duckin' into the library occasional to get more dope from translations of Hermes Trismigestus and Count Graby and Nicolas Flamel and so on. I get to be a expert on alchemy, which some ways is almost as interestin' as science fiction, only not so likely. It looks to me that with a good thick concrete screen and remote-control handling of materials to take care of radiation, it might be a good idea to see if the philosopher's stone formula does give nuclear fission. But right now I try something with immediate practical use. I go after the Elixir of Youth.

3

IT IS surprising how hard it is to get some things. Dragon's blood, which the formula calls for, ain't what you think and you don't buy it at a art store, either. And raw natron is not easy to get hold of. I am almost stumped by ashes of mandrake, though; there simply ain't any mandrake in the United States. But I hunt it up in the botany books, and I find a weed that's a close cousin, I spend two days off in the woods hunting it, and I find some and compare the leaves with those in the book.

Then I got to reduce it to ash, and I'm drifting around in the bay with a terrific stink and plenty of smoke coming from my apparatus in the sailboat. It don't occur to me what it looks like, but all of a sudden there's a booming noise, and a fast motor-yacht is streaking up to me, and it looms up and a couple tough-looking guys are looking me over. One of 'em says: "You on fire, kid. Want us to douse it for you?"

I say no thanks; I am cookin' lunch and it got scorched; they look me over curious and the motor-yacht goes on its way. I read the name on its stern and it's Mr. Vachti's yacht. Even the sailors on his yacht look like those guys he is keeping himself surrounded by—people who remind him of the happy past when he was a bootlegger baron and rode around in a bullet-proof car. They are tough-looking birds, those babies!

I don't see much of old Jode. He gets up in the morning and groans, has black coffee with brandy in it; presently he totters to the bathroom, takes a long shower and dresses up sporty and goes out. But he reports to me from time to time; one day he tells me the rat business worked out perfect, and the Prof has put the bite on him for another five Cs. Then he says the Prof's equipment has arrived and is being set up. Him and Mr. Vachti go and look it over. And I know that Jode sweats some, then, but Mr. Vachti has merely told him firm that he is a sucker being swindled because Mr. Vachti's lawyer has told him so. But nobody is trying to swindle Mr. Vachti yet, so there is nothing he can do about it.

Then the Prof begins his chemical work, putting together dragon's blood and mandrake ash and natron and egg-white. Old Jode goes and watches. He says the Prof puts on a good show, says Mr. Vachti is watching, and fair drooling with wanting to be in on what is a kind of party that just possible might be on the level. But he wants still more to be in on it if it's a swindle. Because just like Jode collects fond memories of having put over artistic tricks, Mr. Vachti collects records of people sent to jail for all the known swindle games. He has no record of a man sent to jail for selling the elixir of life, and he wants one to complete his collection. So ultimate he broaches the matter to Jode. If the Prof is on the level, he says, he knows of a new career surpassin' even that of bootleg baron which he could embark on if he was young again. And if it's a crooked deal, it will sort of climax his career, sending somebody to jail for trying to sell him eternal youth.

Old Jode is fair trembling with the near realization of his ambition, when he tells me this. The deal is made. Mr. Vachti will put up fifty grand in cash for a equal dose of the elixir with the Prof and Jode. If it works,

the cash is his contribution. If it don't work, he gets it back. And Jode is shaky but resolute.

"Now listen," he says, earnest. "I'm checkin' a coupla bags at the airport, and they are important. I'm putting the car in a garage where you or me can get it out fast, but nobody else knows about it. If we got to beat it, I'm goin' to be all set. But—"

I am all set to pull the last business of makin' the elixir, and I got to be undisturbed. I got to do it private. I have gone to the dogpound and looked over the dogs, and there's an old pooch there that somebody sent to have put in the gas-chamber; he is pretty decrepit, but he looks at me wistful when I speak to him. He's just old. So I have bailed him out and he's tied up in the boat now.

I'm going to tell Jode I'll be back late that night. He is a pretty good guy. I know for a fact that he never goes to bed without lookin' in to see that I am all right. Which in a way is insultin' when a guy is sixteen, but in another way ain't so bad. My old man never done nothing like that. I feel kinda fond of old Jode. But I don't want him to know I'm making the elixir until it's all done.

He says, unhappy: "Buck, my boy, anything may happen. According to the Prof's figures, the elixir is gonna be finished today. It is a really beautiful setup. If and when the elixir turns out to be phoney, he is the fall guy; I am absolute in the clear."

"Yeah?" I say.

I have got to keep a alembic—that's a funny-shaped thing which is really a very simple still that you can use as a tower-still if you want to—I have to keep this alembic boiling for twelve hours continous. I can't do it in the hotel; I have got to tie up my boat somewheres to do it. I got a place all picked out on a island off Las Lagunas where nobody is going to notice me. There is a house on the island, but it is always closed up. I have a gasoline torch, and everything is set. But I am going to be back late, and Jode might worry.

"I even figure I know what the Professor intends," says Jode. "It is crude; the Prof is not an artist; even at that. Mr. Vachti and I take our money to his house. The Prof and Mr. Vachti and I take our doses of the elixir together. Then we are supposed to remain there, unobserved, until we are young men again; then we take leave of each other and the Prof goes off to start his life anew with our contributions."

I LOOK at him blank.

"Obviously," says Jode, in a tone suggesting that he feels kind of ashamed for the Prof, "the doses that he gives us will be knockout drops. When we wake up, the Prof will have departed with a large sum."

"Oh," I says.

"It is hopeless crude," says Jode. "My intention, Buck, is simply to switch glasses. True artistry is always simple. But—well—if anything should go wrong, on account of Mr. Vachti, I want you to have this." He hands me a roll that would choke a horse. "And—I hope you will think of me sometimes, Buck. I want you to take off in your sailboat now. Sail down the coast to Esperance. It is only twenty-five miles. I will meet you there at sundown tomorrow. If I have beat it, I will be there; if anything has gone wrong, do not try to contact me until you are completely sure it is safe. If it ain't safe—beat it! And—will you shake hands?"

I think that actual the old fella wants to hug me, but he don't. There are tears in his eyes and his wattles are all red with emotion. But we just shake hands; he isn't a bad guy, in his way. I am pretty fond of old Jode.

But he's cleared the way for what I have to do. I go down to the sailboat, and he waddles along with me; I have some grub ready, but my apparatus is under the deck forward, in the locker. Old Jode is surprised when he sees that dog wag his tail feeble at me. I explain that I just kinda picked him up.

"He will be company for you tonight, Buck," says Jode, wistful. "You have blankets? Take care of yourself, Buck!"

"I'll do it," I says. "Be seein' you."

And I haul up the sail and cast off.

Sailin' away easy from the wharf, I see him standin' there, fat and funny-lookin' in his sporty clothes, and I feel kinda sentimental about him. But I figure that when I finish up this elixir business I will have something to sure-enough pay up for everything and he will treat me with more respect hereafter, besides. So I sail away cheerful, get out the materials and cook myself a hot dog over the gasoline torch, look at the blue sky, admire the scenery and sail casual to that island I got picked out. I haul my boat in under some trees and make everything snug.

It is singular peaceful. There are little waves lapping on the shore, and birds singin' in the trees that cover the island, and now and again a little fish jumps somewhere from a big fish chasin' him. That old pooch lays down and sighs and looks at me grateful, and I get my stuff lined up.

I build a furnace for my alembic outa rocks on shore; I light the torch, and put together the stuff that Hermes Trismigestus says will make the elixir. There is natron and orpiment and dragons blood and egg-white, and ashes of mandrake—anyhow, next-door to mandrake—and the eye of a frog. I got that from a fancy restaurant where they serve frogs-legs and boast the frogs are shipped to them alive. There are other ingredients that don't make sense by modern science. But somewhere among them is a catalyst or a anti-catalyst that produces results which modern pure chemicals wouldn't give. It would be interesting, some time, to find out how to make this stuff with modern chemicals.

I start the alembic to boiling.

ABOUT noon I cook some hot dogs and eat them, and drink some pop; the alembic is boiling slow just like it oughta and making a very unusual smell. The color is a deep red, with various elements swirling around in it like tealeaves. I think of taking a swim but decide against it; I read some science magazines while the elixir of youth is simmering away, and presently I get sleepy and doze off. Then I wake up again and refill the gasoline torch, cook some more hot dogs and eat them. Around that time—it is near sundown—I hear a booming noise. I look out through the trees, and there is that motor-yacht that belongs to Mr. Vachti that stopped to ask if I needed rescuin' the day I was turning mandrake-root to ash. It is a quarter of a mile away, maybe less; I see Mr. Vachti talking to one of his tough-looking crew, and I see the Prof sitting in a deck-chair with a sort of thick fog of gloom around him, and I see old Jode nervous taking a drink from a steward and putting it hasty to his mouth.

I can't figure it. It ain't the schedule Jode told me. I watch the yacht, and it curves around the end of the island. Then I don't feel so good; there is a house on the island, but it is always shut up. I think it over, uneasy, and make sure my alembic is boiling okay—it is kinda bluish, now, and the smell is different and still more unusual—so I sneak careful off through the woods, and presently I get to where I can see. The yacht has anchored and a boat is pulling ashore. I go back to my boat and fret awhile; then I hear the yacht heading back toward Las Lagunas. I feel relieved.

Around eight o'clock that night my flashlight shows me that the stuff in the alembic has turned green. It stinks something fierce, but this is the regular change that Hermes Trismigestus says ought to occur, so I feel pretty good. I drink some more pop and try to read by the flashlight, but it ain't so easy. So I just lay around. It's hard work keeping awake with nothing but the sound of the waves and the night-wind in the trees to listen to; I wish I'd thought to bring along a portable radio, but I didn't. So I take a swim, cook some more hot dogs and offer one to the old pooch. He eats it uninterested and lays down again.

At one o'clock in the middle of the night by my wristwatch, the stuff in the alembic is pale yellow and there ain't much of it. Maybe half a cupfull. And it's funny, but with all the junk I put in there what's left

is clear liquid. Exactly like the alchemy book says. I know that natron —which is a sodium carbonate— hadn't oughta boil away like that, nor orpiment either. And the mandrake ashes ought to stay as a sludge. But they ain't. I guess there was some gaseous metal compounds formed—like uranium hexifluoride— and they boil off. But I can't swear to that explanation. I do what the alchemists said they did, and I get what they said they got.

I am kinda excited, but I wait till the stuff cools off, then I get the skin off a frankfurter, soak up some of the elixir on the meat, and feed it to the old pooch. I put the balance careful in a bottle I have ready. I am plenty sleepy by then, because it is close to two o'clock; I go to sleep.

4

WHEN I wake up in the morning I feel pretty good. I hear something whining close by, and sit up; there is that pooch. He looks a lot spryer than he has been, but he is hungry. When I feed him, he eats until his belly bulges out, and then lays down and goes to sleep. I take another swim; I ain't in any hurry. I have till sundown to get to Esperance to meet Jode. I am divin' when I hear a boomin' sound underwater, so I come up and there is Mr. Vachti's yacht streakin' for the island again. I get on shore and watch from behind the trees; it goes around the end of the island again. About a hour later it goes back to Las Lagunas.

I get worried, put on some clothes and go careful over to where the closed-up house is. It is only one story high, but it sprawls all over and it cost plenty. But it isn't closed up any longer. The windows are open and Mr. Vachti is sitting in a deck-chair on a terrace, smoking a long black cigar. Then I blink; there is Jode, sporty clothes and all, waddling out to speak to him. I see a coupla men working around what I guessed was the kitchen; then I see Prof Henry Barr in person. He has been a spry old goat, but he looks all drooped and unhappy now.

I tell you I get worried, then. Something has gone wrong. I hang around, hoping that Jode will get off by himself somewheres so I can speak to him without Mr. Vachti getting wise. Then that pooch comes snuffling through the woods behind me. He's waked up and trails me by smell. He is frisky, and I can't expect him to have sense enough not to run out squirming and wagging his tail if he sees somebody, or else barking at them. So I have to take him back to the boat and tie him up. I tie him to the mooring-rope, and feed him so he won't howl when I leave.

Nothin' has changed when I get back. Jode waddles around, lookin' bored, but I can tell he is nervous. He doesn't leave the house. Occasional he speaks to Mr. Vachti, like he is suggestin' somethin'. Mostly Mr. Vachti just don't pay any attention. Jode don't have much to say to the Prof. The Prof just sits slumped in a chair and looks miserable.

Noon comes, and I go back to the boat, feed the pooch and myself. I hang around near the house all afternoon. When I go back for something else to eat around supper-time the pooch near eats me up, he is that glad to see me. I take a good look at him. He isn't an old dog any more; he is a kind of gangling just-grown puppy, falling all over himself and just busting out with energy. That elixir has worked on him all right. I make sure he is tied up fast when I leave.

It is dark when I get back to the house. There are lights in the windows. I sneak up close and make sure there isn't nobody watching outside. Presently I duck up to where I can look in a window. It is open, and I could hear. Mr. Vachti says, in a voice that would curdle the Alkahest —that hydrofluoric acid that ate through the test-tube and the sink and the floor: "Since I feel no physical changes, I will give you two just twenty-four hours more!"

"Then what?" asks Jode, apprehensive.

"If by then I am not a young man again," says Mr. Vachti, spiteful, "—and I do not expect to be—my bodyguards will either put you each in a barrel of concrete and dump you overboard at sea—which I do not think they have lost the knack of—or else you go to jail."

JODE WHEEZES indignant: "But there has been no offense, Mr. Vachti!" he protests.

"You tried to swindle me," says Mr. Vachti peevish. "Both of you!"

"I deny that," says old Jode in fine anger, but I see sweat dripping from his wattles. "Not one finger was laid on you or your money! Professor Barr made an experiment, which I financed. You wished to share the results. It was agreed that you should have a dose of the elixir with us, and pay if it worked and not otherwise! But your men grabbed us and hustled us aboard your yacht and brought us here as prisoners! You have had the elixir, yes! You insisted that the experiment go on, on your estate here. But if a crime has been committed," says Jode oratorical, "it has been committed by your hirelings! How will you stand in a court of law, Mr. Vachti, when you are charged with kidnapping?"

I never hear exactly this kind of note in Jode's voice before. But I know what it is; he is scared. Mr. Vachti has not been put through the wringer. Old Jode has a swell trick for it, but it doesn't work. The prof is all set to give Mr. Vachti and Jode knockout drops, and Jode is all set to switch glasses so the Prof and Mr. Vachti will be the ones to pass out. But Mr. Vachti crosses them both up by kidnappin' them and the elixir and takin' his dose in the privacy of his own home with his bodyguards around.

Now Mr. Vachti laughs, and he has absolutely the most unpleasant laugh I ever heard on anybody. "Do you think," he says ironic, "that when I was active in business, I never had anybody kidnapped?"

There is a silence that you coulda cut in chunks. Mr. Vachti laughs again. "I have a hobby," he says, "of putting people in jail when they try to swindle me. You two tried it. I admit," he says, vexed, "that you fixed it so I can't put you in jail for this actual job. Putting you in jail won't be the perfect example I would wish for my files. But you go to jail or into a barrel of concrete!"

"How can you send us to jail?" demands Jode, rather shrill.

"I count on your assistance," says Mr. Vachti, venomous. "My men have been with me for a long time. It has been years since they rodded anybody except a stray burglar or two, and they miss their old-time pursuits. They took a pathetic pleasure in kidnappin' you. It will seem like old times come back again, for them, to put you two into separate barrels of concrete and dump you overboard, even if it is the Pacific Ocean instead of the Chicago River they are dumping you in. They will regard the event with sentiment. They will bump you off with all possible artistic touches, for old times' sake."

Somehow, this statement is absolute convincing. I believe it. So does Jode. "But—jail—" pants Jode.

"In your career," says Mr. Vachti, grim, "you have doubtless performed some feats that interested the police. If you do not want to be encased in concrete, you will tell me of such matters. I will have my lawyers check up. If you can confess to enough actual crimes of which you are actual guilty to tuck you away for what I consider a suitable number of years, I will turn you and your signed confessions over to the cops. Otherwise—"

I CAN SEE Jode's face. He looks at Mr. Vachti incredulous. His expression is filled with a fine disgust, like somebody would feel for somebody who has cheated in a friendly game of pinochle for beers.

Jode's ideals are outraged. To him, tryin' to swindle Mr. Vachti has been a pure matter of professional pride. If Mr. Vachti plays it like it lies, old Jode wins. Mr. Vachti is outsmarted complete, on the artistic level. But instead of conceding graceful that Jode is a master artist, Mr. Vachti plays it dirty.

"That," says old Jode in bitter contempt, "is the lowest trick I have ever seen any man sink to! It is not playing fair! It is welching on a bet! It is—"

"It is my bed-time," says Mr. Vachti, in a voice several degrees harder than granite. "I am going to bed. You two—swindlers can confer and decide whether you go to jail or to the bottom of the Pacific!"

And he means it. Neither the Prof nor Jode nor me has any doubt that he means it. He tries to play a swindle through straight, and he can't touch either the Prof nor Jode, legal, so he plays dirty to get even. I lose the respect I used to have for bootleg barons from what I heard before I got interested in science. Old Jode puffs and grunts in the room Mr. Vachti has left. "Well, Prof." he says disdainful, "What are you going to do?"

The Prof speaks for the first time that I hear. His voice is a shaky, wabbly, despairing moan. "I—ah—there are a coupla cases of forgery I could help the cops to solve," he says feeble; "and once I got out a back window when some post-office inspectors come to the front door. That was usin' the mails to defraud. And—and there are a couple of obtainin' money under false pretenses raps I could take," he says, and sobs, "If Mr. Vachti will be satisfied with them..."

Old Jode squares his shoulders and throws out his stomach. "I," he wheezes scornful, "I sold a gold brick to the United States Mint at Denver! That will get me respect in any court," he says, "and I shall go upon the witness stand and expose the despicable, the contemptible conduct of Mr. Vachti in this instance! And no artist," says Jode, proud, "will have any further use for him! He will be disgraced in the eyes of any worthwhile citizen!"

And Jode waddles splendid from the room, leaving the Prof dissolved in tears behind him.

WELL... It ain't so tough a job. This island all belongs to Mr. Vachti. There ain't any possible hope of escapin' from it unless the yacht comes to take you back to shore. So there ain't even locks on the windows of the room Jode sleeps in. What good would they do? I find out his room by just watchin' shadows on the window-curtain. The light goes out. He comes to open up the window for fresh air, and I whisper to him.

The breath goes outa him until I think he's gonna strangle. I say quick that I got my boat tied up and waiting for him. And old Jode is scared, all right. He eels outa that window waiting only to grab his pants. And we beat it for the boat, only I remember to make him go quiet. On the way I say to him, severe: "You'd ought to have let me make that elixir like I said. Then you wouldn't'a been in this trouble. I told you the Prof would mess it up. He had a good scientific theory, but he is a phoney!"

"You're quite right, Buck," pants Jode. "But let's go faster!"

"It was good, sound, scientific reasoning," I tell him, "only because I ain't but sixteen you hadda decide that I couldn't make that elixir as good as the Prof. All he's got that I ain't is long gray whiskers."

"Yes—yes," Jode gasps. "You are a genius, Buck! How much farther?"

Then we reach the place where I can see the water again. The pooch comes bouncin' joyful to me and puts his paws all over me and licks me enthusiastic. He has got loose from where I tied him. I am peeved, but it is lucky he doesn't trail me to the house. I tell him to come on and keep goin' for where my boat is.

Only it ain't there. I have tied the

pooch to the moorin'-line; bein' a young dog with nothing in particular on his mind, he has chewed reflective on the rope like he woulda chewed on anything else. He has chewed it in two. The boat has drifted off. I see it, a good mile and a half away, bobbing prettily in the streak of light the moon makes on the water. I can't swim that far. Jode and me and the pooch are marooned on Mr. Vachti's private island, and come morning that island is going to be intensive searched.

5

WHEN HE realizes it, Jode cries. He has put up a bold front in front of Mr. Vachti and the Prof, but he has been scared all the way down in his innards. Now he figures he's gonna be caught and either dumped overboard in concrete or else put away for all his declining years, and the grub in penitentiaries is terrible. Also—I got to give him credit for it—he is scared for me. I am on the island; I can't get off neither. And it is anybody's guess what Mr. Vachti will think is appropriate for me. A reform school is the least unpleasing idea that turns up. But Jode looks for worse than that. I believe the old son-of-a-gun is honest fond of me!

But at that it takes plenty of argument to make him take the only possible reasonable course. I suspect he thinks he will die, and that gives him his only argument back. He makes me promise that if he does die I will carry out the plan I had told him for the two of us. I promise, impatient, and give him part of a bottle of pop that was left on shore, with some clear yellow liquid mixed with it. He gulps it down, gagging, while I heave overboard my empty bottles and hasty pack up the hot dogs I got left. I make a muzzle for the pooch so he can't bark, and I use the line he's chewed off for a leash. We go hunting for a good hideout.

We find one; I cover Jode up with leaves and he's moderate comfortable. He talks kinda feverish and panicky about what a shame for a fine young lad like me to be in such a fix as this. But he's run a long ways gettin' to where the boat should be, and he's walked plenty afterward. He ain't used to it. He goes to sleep, all worn out; I doze off myself.

Come morning, Jode is starving. I take a good look at him, and I feel sort of funny. Things ain't working out the way I expect, but I don't say anything. I pass over hot dogs, and Jode wolfs 'em. Nothing else happens for a while. Then the yacht comes past the place where we're hiding, and later I see a coupla guys with guns roaming around. I cover up the pooch's nose with my hand; I don't want no whining. I have looked the pooch over more careful and I am what you might call appalled. But those guys hunting for signs of Jode ain't fooling; they carry their guns very handy. We stay still. Presently I see more guys, also with guns. They are hard-looking fellows. Sailors from the yacht; They hunt systematic.

About the middle of the morning, Jode realizes what is happening. The scene is terrific. There is practically hysterics. I figure that it must be that I don't have real mandrake ash but something else, and it is pretty awful. In fact, Jode is so upset that once I figure I better take my chances with Mr. Vachti. But I don't; after all, no matter how deplorable it is, Jode is still better off than in a barrel of concrete. I argue that way. I don't know that Jode agrees—I doubt it very much, actually—but there ain't any choice now. It's happened.

Come sundown, we fix some emergency clothes out of a blanket because the pajamas Jode is wearing belong to Mr. Vachti and would be recognized. The two of us and the pooch go barging over to Mr. Vachti's house.

It is just about twilight when we get there. The yacht has been back to the mainland again and has brought

out some dogs to track Jode down by smell. My pooch goes over amiable to make friends. There is a clamorous welcome from the other dogs. Very clamorous. Jode steams. Then I explain to a guy that we two was out sailing; we landed, and somebody stole our boat and can they send word so our folks can come for us. It sounds like very respectable family stuff.

There is a strange, profane silence. Nobody suspects it is Jode with me, of course. Mr. Vachti looks us over, suppressing all the cusswords ever known to man. He says to Jode, "Do you usual wear a blanket?" Jode says indignant, "I was sunbathing." Mr. Vachti says bitter. "I can prob'ly find some sailor clothes. I will send you back to the mainland."

He would like to strangle both of us. He figures that the Jode he is after stole the boat and beat it to the mainland. He can't do anything to us because, he figures again, Jode will be working out a list including kidnapping, coercion, threats, and other illegal acts, and a police launch may arrive at any moment. He can't even dump the Prof overboard because of his belief that Jode is on shore preparing a lawsuit. Actual, Jode is right there beside me, boiling mad and wanting enthusiastic to murder me, only not daring to show it.

IT IS A BEAUTIFUL mess. Mr. Vachti has not got a scientific mind, so he can't make even a wild guess at what has happened. He don't believe in the elixir anyhow, and of course he wouldn't know that I had set out to make it. So never in a million years will he hit on the facts.

Jode goes inside the house and puts on the sailor pants and a sweater, and leaves the blanket as a momento. They put us on the yacht and take us back to the mainland, Jode holding aloof because of the likelihood of committing mayhem if I come in arm's reach. I go look at the yacht's engines. I observe that the Prof is on board, white as a sheet and trembling. He does not really believe he is reprieved. But he is.

We get to the dock and go ashore. Jode ain't even polite enough to say "Thanks" for our ride. We march away from the dock. A dog comes up, looking cordial; our pooch hasty gets on friendly terms and the two of them disappear up a side street. I don't care. I have Jode wait for me in a dark place, and I get some of my clothes outa the hotel; then I get the car, and we go get the suitcase outa the airport terminal. We salvage the baggage-check outa Jode's pants-pocket, and beat it the hell away from there.

Jode's mad is one of those steaming ones which one word let out will result in an explosion. There is hardly a word exchanged until we get to the next town and I have pulled up at its swankiest hotel. Then I get out of the car and I say: "Well, so-long, Jode!"

"No, you don't!" pants Jode, grabbing me. "We got to settle this! You got to do something about it! You come along!"

We register, getting rooms next to each other. Jode comes in my room, boiling, and sits down grim. The seat ain't comfortable. Then I blink. Jode is removing large, thick packages of banknotes—folding money—from the hip pockets of the sailor pants. They go on the table. They are impressive.

"Where'd that come from?" I ask, trying to postpone things.

"Mr. Vachti," says Jode, grim, "was all set to pay fifty grand just to see proof that the elixir of youth worked. He told the Prof that. He taunted him with it. He waved the cash in front of his face and repeated, sneering, that he was ready to pay it just to see proof. Well—I'm proof, of a sort. He saw me. So when I went in the house to put on these clothes I stopped by where he'd locked it up. I'm entitled to it. But —you Buck! How did this happen to me?"

I FEEL very much embarrassed but I have got it figured out

[*Turn To Page 96*]

MARTIANS, KEEP OUT!

A POWERFUL NOVELET

★ by Fritz Leiber, Jr. ★



It was one of the few shootings of Martian religious ceremonies that humans had been able to take.

Hatred of the Martians was being deliberately exploited, and Scatterday knew why. And the only way to fight the enslavement of humans, was to assist the Martians, even though it meant risking lynch-law!

illustration by Luros

AND AS IF that sign weren't enough, someone with a red spray pencil had added

THAT MEANS YOU, BUG!

The stiff, black-shelled form, impaled on a spike beside the traffic-way, with gummy beads of blue blood glistening in the sun, told the pretty little story much more graphically.

It hadn't been decapitated; Martians lack external heads.

Scat scanned the tableau, his scarred lean features impassive. "They didn't mention this," he commented. "Do we still go in?"

"You ask questions like that just for the sake of the record, don't you?" Click-Click replied, using his black pincers to produce code in a way that explained his nickname. Though headless, Martians didn't lack brains. Definitely.

Scat switched to the turbine for jetless surface-drive, and the utility car crawled into Bronsco.

A hick town, Scat decided. A couple of 100-story skylons, a mainstreet

of glastic commercial buildings, and rows of distressingly similar homes, all of them Paradise-37's or Eden-2's. But the skylons looked dead; the glastic was dingy, and the shrubbery drooped. A few cars were untidily parked by trafficway. Footpaths worn in the grass showed that the slidewalks hadn't been strategically placed, and not all of them seemed to be working.

Crummy.

But it was in burgs like this that the destiny of the Martians was being decided. In the big metropolis, intellectuals talked "Martian Question" all night. Here, things happened.

Click-Click sat up in plain view—not to see, but to be seen. Eyeless perception gave him as good a picture as Scat's of the town—less range, but a lot more three-dimensional.

His shiny black body and jointed arms brought some coldly unfavorable, lingering stares, but nothing more; broad daylight didn't lend itself to lynchings.

When they entered the offices of the *Bronsco Newsbeam,* old Donnolan acted as if he had been betrayed. His scraggly eyebrows gyrated contortedly above his pale, close-set eyes. "If I'd had any idea that I was selling the *Newsbeam* to a damn bug-lover...!" he finally howled impotently.

"Get off my property," said Scat in a low voice.

"Jonas Scatterday the Liberator!" Donnolan's eyes became crooked blue needles of bigotry. "Seems to me I recall you're a bug-smuggler, too. Mixed up in the Underground Skyway to Antarctica..."

"Get off my property," Scat repeated.

As Donnolan sidled out, he uttered those famous last words which are as old as wishful thinking—and blustering cowardice. "You can't do this to me!"

In the transmission room, Scat explained the changed situation to the *Newsbeam* employees, with Click-Click standing beside him. A grizzled old beam-doctor expressed their sentiments. "I guess we'll stick with you, Mister. I won't say we like it, but it's our jobs."

Scat nodded unenthusiastically. He knew the arrangement wouldn't last out the day, but as Click-Click had observed, there were a lot of things he did for the sake of the record.

TEN MINUTES later they had the Missionary sizzling on the beam, after a brief editorial statement of the new ownership and policy. Click-Click had fetched the master tapes from the car.

Anachronistically speaking, the Missionary was dynamite. Scat switched him in on the transmission room screen and sat down to listen, unmindful of the guardedly resentful looks he got from the staff. As he listened, his lanky frame relaxed and his stony features softened a little.

The Missionary wasn't blind, but he had the spiritual look some blind men get. He was cadaverous; his voice got under your ribs.

"Living machines! It is by virtue of that legal fiction that we have denied the Martians even the humanitarian treatment we grant to domestic animals, that we have revived an institution as vile as it is old in order to exploit them, that we have spurned all communion with their gentle minds. Living machines! The Earth's bad conscience is the best testimony to the falsity of that fiction, though even the most confirmed Martian-hater recognizes it. He says, succinctly, 'Bug'.

"But they're soulless, you claim. Inhuman. Without feelings. Well, fellow free-citizens of the World Confederation, I went to preach the Word to those living machines on their home planet. I had to fight Outer Spaceways to get permission to do it; I had to live in a cramped little pressure hut and wear a spacesuit whenever I went among them; I had to shiver under their meager sun because fuel supplies were somehow always late in getting to me. But I was happy because I was going to

teach the Martians our religion.

"I soon found out, however, that it was they who ought to be teaching me!"

A scene of Martian religious ceremonies followed, one of the few shots that humans had been able to obtain. The speaker's voice continued.

"Lacking their perception and telepathy, it wasn't easy to get in contact with their minds, but we discovered ways. I found out how they live, what they believe in.

"I was going to teach them our Golden Rule. They taught me theirs—the Golden Rule of a telepathic race. *'Do unto others as others would have you do unto them'.*"

Not many people watching in at this hour, but the Missionary's words were being faithfully recorded in every home owning a *Bronsco Newsbeam* set. And during supper, when people switched on the news, there'd be a lot of Martian-owning or Martian-supported fathers and husbands who'd get indigestion and have to be restrained from busting up the set. They'd flash a protest to the *Newsbeam;* they'd record an indignant tape to the government.

More to the point, they'd squawk to Kemmerdygn. Which reminded Scat that he had business. "While I'm gone, you take orders from him," he told the staff, indicating Click-Click. "Any question you got, he'll write you an answer."

HE WALKED out without waiting for the reaction. A small boy was soaping *Bugs* on the glastic. *It begins,* thought Scat. He tossed an old news-spool at the boy and hopped in the car.

He passed up the skylon housing the front offices of *Kemmerdygn Mining Interests* and headed straight for Ten Mile. If they were going to give him the runaround, it might as well be on the spot.

Outside city limits, the trafficway skirted Bugtown. He parked to get pix. Some shots of those miserable burrows and those apathetic black forms—so spiritless in comparison with a healthy, psychically sound, enlightened Martian like Click-Click—would fit nicely into an article he was doing for the *Free Martian Monthly.* And maybe something for the *Newsbeam Sunday Suppliment*—if the new ownership lasted that long.

Why, there were only two refrigerators for the whole community, and the measly vacuum shack was inadequate even for mating purposes. But owners didn't worry about the interminable process of Martian gestation and maturation—not while Outer Spaceways was running the theoretically illegal Bug Trade wide open.

With an almost savage flirt of his fingers, he switched in the smell-getter. Might as well give the owners of sets with olfactory reception a whiff of sick Martian while he was at it.

A rangy, loose-jawed man slouched out of the bushes on the other side of the trafficway. A tarnished squirt gun was stuck conspicuously in the belt of his smock. "What might you be doing, Mister?" he drawled.

"Admiring the scenery," Scat replied harshly. "Bronsco should be proud!"

And he gave him his jets.

2

AT TEN MILE, his tape of introduction from World Mine Owners got Scat admitted to a manager's office pronto.

He explained, "I've been commissioned to do an article on how you keep the bugs happy in the world's deepest mine." He didn't say for what publication.

"Of course, we have our standard news releases...er, Mr. Martin," the manager began tentatively. He was frowning at Scat, trying to place him.

"They're a bit stodgy, I'm afraid," Scat replied. "We wanted something with more life to it—shots of the bugs working the radioactives in the ten-mile drifts, and so on. Pictures of the bugs playing games and go-

ing through their primitive ceremonials when Mars is in the sky. All specially posed and rehearsed, of course."

"I see. Yes, there's something to what you say, all right." The manager nodded wisely, pursing his little lips. "It could be made a lot more convincing that way. Of course, we'd have to get an okay from Mr. Kemmerdygn's secretarial offices, Mr.... er..."

The faraway look that came into his eyes told Scat that the whisper-transmitter behind his ear had gone into action. The manager's expression didn't change very much, but his plump little hand crept down out of sight and pressed something. Donnolan must have squawked loud and fast—and to the right people, Scat decided regretfully.

A couple of barrel-chested men with "bug-boss" written all over them ambled in. The manager came around the table and grabbed at Scat's right arm. Scat evaded the movement, caught his hand, and squeezed; the manager squealed. The bug-bosses moved forward, but Scat released him.

"Yes, the name's Scatterday," he said. "And duraplast's considerably harder than flesh."

Everybody knew that Jonas Scatterday had lost his right arm from squirt gun corrosive while standing off a raid on an eastern bugtown.

The manager nursed his hand. His puffy little while face was venomous. He said, "We could have you in court for using a bogus tape of introduction to try to sneak in and agitate among our bugs. But since you've so conveniently put yourself in our hands, I don't believe it will be necessary to call in the law."

Scat laughed. "Better check first with Kemmerdygn's secretarial offices. With the situation as it is, and all those government contracts that you're having to hump yourselves to fulfill, I don't think they'd want anything to happen that would raise a stink. If Jonas Scatterday should disappear at Ten Mile, I'm afraid the government—regretfully of course—would have to take a hand."

As he walked out, the manager acted as if he were about to give the bug-bosses an order. But he didn't.

SCAT PARKED the utility car in front of the *Newsbeam*. A rock clunked against the duraplast of the tail; he didn't turn around. There were more signs soaped on the glastic, but a chunky little man with a great shock of red hair was erasing them. Scat called "Hi, Len," and walked in.

Donnolan was waiting for him with a couple of seedy-looking policemen. He jumped up and waved a spool under Scat's nose. "Put that on your pocket projector!" he chortled triumphantly. "It's an injunction restraining you from publishing the *Newsbeam*, because fraud was employed in its purchase."

Scat pushed past him, remarking casually, "The regional court has attested the legality of the sale and has set aside any and all injunctions against the present ownership of the *Newsbeam* based on those grounds. The whole world doesn't take orders from Kemmerdygn—quite!"

The light of triumph in Donnolan's watery blue eyes flickered. "The regional court can't set aside an injunction that hasn't even been issued yet," he protested; "it's not legal!"

Scat opened a drawer and tossed him a spool. "A stat of the regional court's decision," he explained. "For you to keep. Read it and amplify your knowledge of law."

As he walked into the transmission room, he added, "There's a projector on the desk."

"Well, how did you and the staff get along together?" he asked Click-Click. Audible speech wasn't strictly necessary. Martians being telepathic, but it was generally easier to say a question than to think it.

"Just fine," Click-Click coded back at him. "Some men are as bad as unenlightened Martians; they'd take orders from anything. But after a while the staff had callers and

walked out in a body. Seems they'd all been offered jobs with Kemmerdygn—and the promise that he'd eventually make them his pensioners.

"They walked out while the beam was hot," Click-Click ticked on, "but that didn't make any difference, because by that time Len and the boys had arrived with the truck and they took over."

"The next injunction," remarked Scat, a little dreamily, "will be on the grounds that we're employing Martians in semi-restricted jobs. But it's the one after that I'm worrying about."

Len came in smiling. "All clean for the night," he announced. "Except for one sign, which said, *Bugs inside*. I just changed it to *Martians* and left it."

After getting out the late news flashes, Click-Click and his three compatriots retired to the refrigerated vacuum tank which had been the truck's chief freight. Scat and Len were in the office having a last smoke before their cat-nap. The lights outside made oddly distorted patterns on the glastic, and the soaped sign Len had left was silhouetted blackly.

MARTIANS INSIDE

"Calling you. Calling you," came the sweetish feminine sing-song from the talk-see on the desk. The button blinked red but the screen didn't come on. Len pushed the lever, but the screen stayed black. Scat smiled thinly.

"Jonas Scatterday and Len Cutt," came a slow, deep whisper from the black screen. "This is the voice of the Mystic X. Bronsco will not tolerate bug-lovers. We are, however, giving you one chance; get out now and take your bugs with you, and you won't be harmed."

Len joggled the lever futilely. "Blacked out their end," he surmised. "Halloween stunts. I got a mind to put *The Ghoul Laughs* in the projector and play it back at them."

But he didn't look quite as amused as he sounded.

The button went black, and Len stood there, remembering things. "It was Mystic X who blew up the Martian Clinic the *Free Martian* started in Scarnston."

"Right," said Scat. "Let's get some sleep."

TOWARD morning he awoke with a start. He groped out and found the switch, but the lights didn't come on; the darkness was absolute. While he slept, the glastic had somehow been rendered opaque.

As he lay there, he heard the unmistakable click of pinchers from the transmission room and the faint moan of the beam. He realized then what must have happened. Lighting power was local—in conformity with some Bronsco ordinance. So they'd been able to cut it off. But beam power was regional—and they weren't tampering with that yet. Click-Click had taken in the situation and had decided not to wake him or Len while he and his pals got out the morning edition. Human beings couldn't operate very effectively until the lighting system had been jury-rigged on beam power.

The busy clicking continued. Scat smiled. Martian perception was independent of light; Click-Click must be getting a kick out of this.

Still, he'd better get up. He'd dreamed some improvements in the editorial. Probably gone out already, but they could always back-tape and dub in the changes.

In the morning he and Len strolled out in front. Every square inch of glastic was covered with black paint, still sticky and glistening from the spray guns.

"Kinda like the new color," remarked Len, loudly for the benefit of some passers-by. "Black for Free Martia!"

Scat sent him out to try and buy some food and rent sleeping quarters in the Bronsco Recreational Center, which occupied the Number Two skylon. Just for the sake of the record. Len would discover that the

hostelry was full up and that, by some strange mischance, there didn't happen to be any food in Bronsco today.

A chalked sign—*Kill the Bugs*—came coasting by on the slidewalk. Scat put down his foot in front of it and let the slidewalk do the erasing.

Back in the transmission room he discovered that Click-Click's three companions had increased to five during the night.

"Passengers for the Underground Skyway?" asked Scat. And this time he just thought the question.

Click-Click coded an affirmative. "From Ten Mile. They guessed we must be in the neighborhood from the Martian Tape we're running in the *Newsbeam*. All the Martians out at Ten Mile are picking up the Tape—beam-perception or the good old telepathic grapevine. They're crazy about it; it's the first entertainment they've had in months."

The Martian Tape was one of the trickiest things that Scat handled. Any hint of agitation or even of attempted enlightenment among owned Martians was strictly forbidden—that was one point where the government would crack down fast. Hence the Martian Tape, adapted to beam-perception, had to be, and was, purely recreational—devoted to vastly complex brain-teasers in solid geometry and other mental sports dear to Martians.

Click-Click continued, "These two somehow managed to slip past the bug guard; they're begging me to send them to the Reservation."

3

THE Martian Reservation had been established in Antarctica by an administration noted for its uneasy and fluctuating liberalism—much like the present one. The Reservation had been a bone of contention ever since. On it, Martians were to all intents free from human supervision. Although conditions were none too good, and food supply was always a critical problem, it served as a beacon of hope to enslaved Martia. It was largely because of the existence of the Reservation that border patrols, ground and sky, local and regional, had been made almost fantastically heavy.

"You've told them the dangers?" asked Scat.

"They still want to go."

"Okay then; get the cans ready. And for cripes sake keep them in the icebox until!"

There were a half dozen pallid, flat-chested youths waiting in the outer office. They acted nervous, and whenever the slidewalk in front creaked with the weight of a passer-by, they'd all look around quickly and then remember that you couldn't see through the glastic any more. When no footsteps came, they'd relax a little.

One of them hurried up. "Mr. Scatterday?"

"That's right."

Instantly the youth adopted a conspiratorial air. His companions crowded behind him, craning their necks but keeping an eye cocked on the door. "We're the Executive Council of the Young Freeworkers," he whispered hoarsely. "It's an undercover movement in the Bronsco Young Peoples' Organization. We want to thank you for your editorial *End-Product of Patronage—Feudalism!* It was just like listening to our own constitution—only better expressed."

"Thanks."

"Gee, Mr. Scatterday, *we* don't like being pensioners of Kemmerdygn," the youth continued, a little more human now that he had discharged his mission. "We don't want to spend our lives playing games and getting an endless third-rate education and being Kemmerdygn's cheering section. We're only pensioners because our fathers were. But what can we do? All the restricted jobs have a waiting list a light-year long, and we're too poor to buy the specialized education that's required for most of them. Kemmerdygn keeps cutting down the pension-allotments—just like you said."

"Sure," Scat agreed matter-of-factly. "He employs Martians and pays Earthmen. A very profitable arrangement, considering the greater efficiency of Martian labor and the reduction in operating expenses. If Kemmerdygn switched to human labor, he'd have to ventilate his mines, increase the size of the drifts, provide special protective garments and all sorts of safety devices. Even at that, it's doubtful if human beings could do the work. The situation's practically the same with regard to all other non-restricted jobs."

"That's right!" Another youth cut in—a dark browed, surly kid. "Nobody can expect us to compete with bugs! We want work—any sort, so we can feel we got a stake in the world. But everywhere we look, it's bugs, bugs, *Bugs!*"

"And who's to blame?" asked Scat softly. "You and me. Our fathers; our grandfathers. You know your history. Importation of Martians was permitted only on condition that for every 'living machine' employed on Earth, the owner would retire an Earthman on perpetual pension. That was the juicy, mouth-watering bait dangled in front of workers' eyes so they'd vote in an administration that would pass the Martian Importation Act. But what does it add up to now? You're living on charity; the Martians are enslaved. Under those circumstances it takes a little courage for either of you to stick up for your rights."

"We gotta get rid of the bugs!" asserted the surly kid. "That's what we gotta do. Run 'em off Earth!"

"Been listening to the Mystic X, Sonny?" Scat inquired. "Or is that just the line Kemmerdygn hands you?"

"Kemmerdygn's not so bad," the kid retorted hotly. "He wants to get rid of the bugs, but he can't on account of competition. After all, he's got us to support. As Kemmerdygn says, the fight now is to keep the bugs from grabbing off all the restricted jobs too. You know, give a bug a micron and he'll take a meter!"

CLICK-CLICK came in and walked over to Scat's desk. All the youths were obviously surprised when he didn't go down on all fours and take the most circuitous route possible. As he strolled blithely past, they automatically drew back to avoid any suspicion of contact. After that, their reactions diverged. The surly kid scowled and held his nose, but the spokesman looked ashamed; a flaming blush crept over his pale face. He chewed his lip, nerving himself.

"Mr. Scatterday," he began suddenly, "I don't know about the others." He looked around doubtfully, almost fearfully, at his companions. "But I personally haven't got anything against the...er..." He glanced self-consciously at Click-Click. "...Martians."

From where he was rummaging in the desk, Click-Click coded briskly to Scat, "Coming up in the world, us bugs."

"I don't believe all that Kemmerdygn tells us," the spokesman continued, nervously, but with less hesitation. "I think he's just trying to put pressure on us so we'll enlist in the Martian Patrol or his own private..." He looked apologetically at Click-Click. "...bug guard. Personally, I'd like to see the Martians get a square deal." At this point the surly kid gave a snort of disgust and walked out of the office along with one of the others. "I really would. But Kemmerdygn says that if he had to put in all the improvements the Liberators are agitating for, it would mean cutting down the pension-allotments to almost nothing, so whole families would actually starve." His next words were almost a plea. "Gee, you don't really believe that would happen, do you Mr. Scatterday?"

Scat smiled at him, a little sadly. "Look, boys," he said. "I only know one thing about your problems. This is it. You're going to be pensioners—maybe well fed, maybe starving—but pensioners until every Martian is free."

The youth gulped; when he answered, it was in a very small voice

and with a kind of sigh. "I guess that's what I believe, too," he said.

His three companions nodded.

"There was a Martian lynched here a couple of days ago," Scat continued gently. "Where were you?"

He hung his head. "Gee, Mr. Scat-terday, there's so few of us..."

"Yes," said Scat. "So few of us."

Their eyes met.

The slidewalk creaked and this time there were footsteps. Click-Click walked out with the tray of tapes he had been assembling. "By his looks, a bishop at least," he coded cryptically.

The door opened and there swept in a red-faced figure, colorfully august in the brown and gold robes of the Reformed and Reconciled Churches of the World. His stern, bloodshot eyes instantly fixed themselves on the remains of the Executive Council of the Young Freeworkers. They hastily excused themselves. They didn't exactly slink out, but they obviously had a hard time fighting the impulse.

The churchman wheeled on Scat. "I am the Reverend Arthur Allerdyce Bassett, spiritual monitor of Bronsco," he announced in a booming voice. "I have come to voice religion's protest against a publication which seeks to pander to the vilest impulses in man and bug, to reduce a creature made in the Lord's image to equality with his machines, to besmirch human dignity and sully the purity of Earth's womanhood by advocacy of open commerce with the foulest and most pruriently prying minds in all creation!"

He paused for breath.

Scat figuratively rubbed his hands. This was something he could get his teeth into. He could hardly wait to bring up the Missionary.

Fifteen minutes later the Reverend Bassett stalked out spluttering threats; he'd done everything but mention the Mystic X by name.

SCAT'S SATISFIED grin evaporated fast. He paced restlessly. Twice he pounded his palm and his lips formed the syllables, "Kemmerdygn." He recorded at an editorial, had to keep back-taping, gave it up. Finally he sat down at his desk and flashed Ten Mile.

"I want to talk-see Mr. Kemmerdygn."

"I'll connect you with his secretarial offices."

"I'm sorry, but Mr. Kemmerdygn is in conference."

"He'll be interested," Scat told the pretty, efficient-looking girl. "Tell him I want to beam a story about how he's begun to install at Ten Mile the most up-to-date and humane Martian-protective devices of any mine in the world."

A brief wait.

"Mr. Kemmerdygn has no comment. Good day."

Click-Click came in. He extended his pinchers for Scat's inspection. "My new manicure," he explained. "I've been forging the pincher-ridge patterns of one of those Martians we're keeping for the Underground. That's the only identification that means anything to a human. Get the idea?"

Scat frowned. "Too risky. You might get into Ten Mile, but I don't think you'd get out; we need you here."

"They need me more. Out there in their holes, while I can hop into a vacuum tank every night..." Suddenly Click-Click's pinchers stiffened. "Len's outside," he coded tersely. "I think he wants you; looks like they've brought a finder."

"Finder!" Scat shot up. "Got the cans ready?"

"Yes. Shall we put them in?"

"Not yet. But be ready."

He hurried out. There was a utility car with the Kemmerdygn insignia parked in front. Two scowling bug guards were arguing with Len. Their hands were suggestively near their squirt guns. One of them had a dirty-smocked girl by the wrist. She had a silly, open mouthed grin that just seemed to stay there; she drooled.

"We were telling him you got Ten Mile bugs inside," the bug guard explained to Scat.

Scat looked at him steadily. "We employ Martians to run the beam. They've confused your finder."

The guard pulled the girl to him. "Look Piggie," he said, "these people got bugs of their own. Maybe it's those you been feeling?" She shook her head stubbornly, like a little child. "It's our Ten Mile bugs you feel then? You're sure?" Her head bobbed up and down.

Bug finders were human beings with an inborn sensitivity to Martian telepathy, usually mentally defective. They could not interpret the telepathy, but they had an uncanny knack for distinguishing the characteristic thought-waves of an individual Martian.

The guard looked up at Scat. "We're coming in, Mister; Piggie never misses." He put his hand on his squirt gun.

4

SCAT FELT very conscious of his artificial arm. There was a tremor in the stump he couldn't control. From the door behind him he heard the code for "Catch!" He half turned and picked a blaster out of the air with his good hand.

"Not on my property," he told the guard.

The guard hesitated. "Okay then. Make us do it the hard way," he said. They got in the car and drove off, Piggie making inarticulate sounds of protest and having to be dragged.

Scat's eyes followed them. "Get out the truck," he told Len. "You're going to Manford to buy groceries. Click-Click, can your visitors. Fast."

"Underground?" Len asked with a look. Scat nodded.

About the time Len was ready to roll, the bug guards came jetting back, accompanied by a policeman who looked and acted exactly like them, except for the uniform.

"Got a warrant to search your place for fugitive bugs," he told Scat. "Hold on there!" he called to Len, who was starting the truck. "Let's have a look before you get away."

The bug guard led Piggie to the truck. She was making anxious, eager noises. Unexpectedly Click-Click came out from behind the truck, so that they almost collided. Piggie squealed and backed off, flapping her arms. The guard grabbed at his squirt gun, but Scat interposed.

"Your bug done that on purpose," the guard blustered threateningly. "He knows Piggie's no good for as much as ten minutes after she gets that close to a bug."

They searched the truck thoroughly. The body was empty except for some boxes of tape scrap and three medium sized cannisters conspicuously labeled in red:

CAUTION!
BEAM REFUSE GAS
Standard Container

Len's hand hovered over one of the cocks. "Want a sniff?" he asked pleasantly.

The guard gave him a sour look. Beam refuse gas was so deadly a poison that it could not safely be disposed of by any ordinary methods. It had to be shipped to a reconditioning plant in containers that were seamless—supposedly.

And these three cannisters actually contained beam refuse gas under standard pressure—they'd have to, in order to pass the minute inspection made at the regional border.

But the shell of a Martian is one of the most impermeable armors ever developed by organic evolution, and when quiescent he can go upwards for an hour without breathing. This is because he is built for an extremely rarified atmosphere—his physiology is typical of a depleted-planet economy. On Mars his inhalation/exhalation ratio is about 100/1. The chief problem in acclimitizing him to Earth is teaching him to inhale as infrequently as he exhales—otherwise oxygen-drowning occurs. A Martian's lungs are really oxygen accumulators. He has 100 per cent utilization of inhaled oxygen, and he exhales pure carbon di-

oxide freighted with other respiratory excretions—hence the "bad breath" so obnoxious to human beings.

WITH A JAUNTY wave of his hand, Len crawled off and the search moved inside the building. Scat stayed with them to make sure nothing was overlooked. But Piggie, recovered, maintained with sullen headshakes that she no longer felt the presence of Ten Mile bugs, and after that the guards lost interest. Scat could tell that they were puzzling as to how he'd smuggled out the bugs while they were getting the warrant—for undoubtedly there'd been Kemmerdygn spies watching the *Newsbeam* building to prevent just such a move.

Afterwards Scat said to Click-Click, "I was a little worried when they took your pincher-prints."

"Anticipated," the Martian coded laconically. "I removed the forgeries, but since I have the casts they can easily be replaced. At first I thought of letting the guards pick me up here, but that would be too suspicious."

"It's going to be suspicious wherever it happens," said Scat, shaking his head. "In any case, you won't be able to pass bug-finder identification. Don't do it, Click-Click."

"You told Len to drop in at the *Free Martian* offices and fetch a Martian to replace me?"

"You're bound and determined then?"

"Yes."

Scat sighed. "Okay, Click-Click. Yes, I told Len."

Scat felt a black pincher lightly touch his shoulder. "Dont mope, Scat. I get a great kick out of going contrary to your orders; after all, it's my badge of enlightenment. Most Martians are too obliging—it's our great racial sin. Works all right when everybody's telepathic—thought-pressure keeps the potential transgressor against social welfare in line. But when a telepathic race comes up against a non-telepathic one—ouch! Then the thought-pressure is all going one way. Our Golden Rule worked on Mars, but it sure got us into trouble here."

* * *

That evening, while Scat was having his last smoke, he wished that Len were there to chin with. He kept wondering, profitlessly, how long the regional court would hold out against the pressure Kemmerdygn was undoubtedly bringing to bear. Vacillating governments were the curse of eras like this—rather, the inevitable accompaniment. He wondered if there would be a civil war and to what degree he would be responsible for it. Tonight it was hard to dodge that question.

The talk-see button flashed, as he'd been expecting it to. This time the screen didn't stay completely dark. A wavering "X" glowed there. Black paper painted with phosphorescence and clapped over the screen at their end, he judged.

"Jonas Scatterday, you have disregarded our advice," came the whisper. "That is unwise. Your time-allotment is almost up. This is the last warning."

Scat wondered if he ought to have the call traced. Fat chance, with all the talk-see operators locals. Still, for the sake of the record...but he felt tired.

SOMETIME THAT night Click-Click departed, but Len got back with the replacement in time for the morning edition. Afterwards he showed Scat a big ugly splotch on the tail of the truck where squirt gun corrosive was eating in.

"Tried to stop me on the way back just outside Bronsco," he explained as he swabbed on the decontamination fluid. "Had a barricade up, but I gunned my jets and managed to jump it."

He went on swabbing. "You know," he said reflectively, "the only good sign I've noticed in this burg so far is that the kids aren't bothering us so much. Maybe it's because we're running *Space Pals* and *In the Days of the Airplane.* Those're a lot bet-

ter than the crummy comics Donnolan was feeding them."

Scat laughed mirthlessly. "And maybe it's just because they've stepped back to give their parents a chance."

Pessimism wasn't usually Scat's forte, but he'd just reached the mental conclusion that it would be three days before the regional court would weaken and give Kemmerdygn—and the Mystic X—what amounted to carte blanche to handle the *Newsbeam* situation any way they wanted to.

Actually, his guess was a day short. But that was no satisfaction; they were miserable days, all four of them. Days of feeling that there was no use beaming the news, because no one would watch it anyway. A steady stream of cancelled subscriptions—sets coming back for refund. Complaints. Threats from various sources. Attacks on their Martians. Nuisances, like putting stench gas in the ventilators while they were beaming an edition. No word from Click-Click, though Scat drove one of the Martians past Bugtown to try to pick up something on the grapevine. Fruitless conferences with the officers of the *Free Martian* and members of the Martian Lobby—they were moving heaven and earth to keep the regional court in line, but it showed signs of wavering.

Most of all, the feeling that a wall was being built around the *Newsbeam*, shutting it off from the rest of the world. You couldn't see that wall, but everywhere in Bronsco you could touch it.

* * *

Late afternoon the fourth day, while they were getting out the evening edition, the wall was completed. Beam power went.

Len tried to flash the repair offices. The talk-see was dead.

"Looks like this is it," he told Scat.

Scat nodded. "Now look here. Len..." he began.

A half hour later he was still trying to persuade Len to take the boys in the truck and make a run for it, when the spokesman of the Young Freeworkers stumbled into the office.

"Ran the slidewalks to warn you, Mr. Scatterday," he panted. "Mystic X. They're planning to get you tonight. Everybody's whispering. There's a lot of cars in the air, and they got big guards on all the traffic ways—some of 'em are blocked off."

"What'd I tell you?" crowed Len. "We couldn't have got out anyway."

This was it all right, thought Scat. The regional court had knuckled under; the *Newsbeam* was finished. Kemmerdygn's victory was so complete that they were being saved up as a kind of tidbit for the Mystic X.

Just like the Martian Clinic in Scarnston.

Of course, they'd known it was coming. The *Free Martian* would demand that the regional government send in troops to prevent violence. Failing there, they would ship some of their own people into Bronsco. If they could.

"Thanks for telling us, kid," said Scat. "You better beat it now. No objections! Push him out, Len."

SLOWLY THE night came down. It was like being in a fortress with the silence, and the pocket illuminators casting a ghostly light and every now and then one of the Martians clicking a terse report. Scat's stump bothered him.

Gradually a crowd gathered, outside the range of Martian telepathy, but inside perception.

"Mostly pensioners, but some bug guard," one of the Martians coded. "Donnolan's there, and..." He ticked off the names of a half dozen fairly prominent Bronsco figures. "Hold on; there's a new contingent moving in; they're wearing masks."

The talk-see began to work again. "Jonas Scatterday and Len Cutt, we're giving you one more chance. We want all of you outside. You two come out with your hands in the air, your bugs on all fours."

"We don't propose to die so quiet-

ly," Scat answered. "If you want us, come get us. I intend to defend my property. We're armed—*all* of us."

Arming bugs! If they'd had any chance, that action had queered it.

The minutes dragged. From somewhere a pellet gun opened up and began to rattle interminably against the glastic. Len began to swear in a low, steady voice. The Martians moved their guns around as if admiring the internal workmanship. Scat realized that he was tapping out "Come on, Come on," in Martian code over and over again with his duraplast fingers.

"There's a new bunch joined them," a Martian informed him finally. "They seem to be arguing. I don't know about what—too far. They're moving off!"

"Kemmerdygn Interests calling Mr. Scatterday."

They all started at that musical voice—even the Martians. Scat jumped for the desk and flipped on the screen. He recognized the secretary he had conferred with.

"Mr. Kemmerdygn hopes you haven't suffered any unpleasantness," she informed him smilingly. "He took steps as soon as he heard you were in trouble. He particularly desires you to resume publication of the evening edition of the *Newsbeam*. Oh, and about that article you were planning. He would like to confer on it at some later date. You *will* finish beaming the evening edition, won't you? Good evening."

As she flashed off, Len began to swear again, but in a different vein.

"There's more in this than..." Scat began. "...but we got tapes to beam. Get going!"

HE DIDN'T return until after the *Newsbeam* had been put to bed. There was a black figure sitting at his desk.

"Click-Click!"

"Absolutely." The Martian waved his pinchers airily—a startlingly human gesture. "You probably guessed what happened, but I thought maybe you'd want a personal report. The Martians at Ten Mile struck—every last one of them. Almost unprecedented, but not quite."

And with those government contracts hanging over his head, Kemmerdygn couldn't afford to lose half a day, Scat appended mentally.

"I won't say that I didn't have anything to do with it," Click-Click continued. "I kept the old grapevine humming. But most of the credit goes to the Martian Tape. The Martians were wild when it wasn't published today—especially because it carried the answers to yesterday's puzzles. Even Kemmerdygn couldn't figure out that one. They're going back to work now, but I imagine they'll be a long time forgetting this initial lesson in self-assertion."

Scat looked down at Click-Click. He grabbed his pincher and squeezed it—hard. Click-Click squeezed back—harder. But since it was Scat's duraplast hand, it didn't matter.

THE END

REPEAT INVITATION

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Sincerely yours,

The Editor.



illus-
tration
by Luros

Those fool deserters had to bring their women back with them.

Shadows of Empire

by Lester del Rey

(author of "Imitation of Death")

The Fifth Army was being recalled from Mars, and Earth's far-flung empire was beginning to fade . . .

WE SLIPPED out of the post while Mars' sky was still harsh and black, and the morning was bitter with cold. Under us was the swish of the treads slapping the worn old sands, and from the lorries came the muttered grumbling of the men, still nursing their hangovers. The post was lost in the greyness behind us, and the town was just beginning to stir with life as we left it. But it was better that way; the Fifth had its orders back to Earth after ten generations outside, and the General wanted no civilian fuss over our going.

It had been enough, just hearing the click at the gate, and seeing the few pinched-faced, scared people along the streets as we passed. Most of us had been there well over ten years, and you can't keep men segregated from the townspeople in the outposts. Well, they'd had their leave the night before, and now we were on our way; the less time spent thinking about going, the less chance for thoughts of desertion to ripen.

At that, two of the men had sneaked off into the wastelands with a sand-tractor and lorry. I'd have liked to find them; after twenty years with the Service, things like that get under your skin. But we couldn't wait for a week hunting them, when the Emperor had his seal on our orders.

Now a twist in the road showed the town in the dim dawn-light, with the mayor running up tardily and tripping over a scrap of a flag. And

old Jake, the tavern-keeper, still stood among the empty boxes from which he'd tossed cartons of cigarettes to us as he went by. Lord knows how much we still owed him, but he'd been Service once himself, and I don't think that was on his mind. Yeah, it was a good town, and we'd never forget it; but I was glad when the road twisted back and the rolling dunes cut it off from view. I'm just plain people, myself, not one of your steel-and-ice nobility like the General.

And that was why I was still only a Sergeant-Major, even though I had to take second command nowadays. In the old times, of course, they'd have sent out young nobles to take over, with proper titles, but I guess they liked it better back on Earth now. For that matter, we'd had few enough replacements in my time, except those we'd recruited ourselves from the town and country around. But what the hell—we managed. The Fifth lacked a few men and some fancy brass, but I never heard a marauding Torrakh laugh over it, even after bad fuel grounded our last helicopter.

Now the little red sun came up to a point where we could turn the heaters off our aspirators. We were passing through a pleasant enough country, little farms and canal-berry orchards. The farm folks must have figured we were out on a raid again, because they only waved at us, and went on with their work; the thick-wooled sheep went on blaatting at themselves with no interest in us. Behind me, someone struck up a half-hearted marching song on an old lectrozith, and the men picked it up.

That was better. I sighed to myself, found one of my legs had gone to sleep, and nursed the prickles out of it while the miles slipped behind, and the hamlets and farms began to thin out. In a little while we were reaching the outskirts of the northern desert, and the caterpillar tracks settled down to a steady sifting slap that's music to a man's ears. We ate lunch out of our packs while the red dunes rolled on endlessly in front of us.

IT WAS a couple hours later when the General's tractor dropped abreast of me and his so-called adjutant vaulted to my seat, his usually saturnine face pinched into a wry grin. Then the radio buzzed and he lifted it to my ear with a finger over his lips.

The General's precise voice clipped out. "Close up ranks, Sergeant; we've spotted a band of Torrakhi moving in the direction of the town. Probably heard we're leaving, and they're already moving up; but they'd be happy to stop for a straggler, so keep together."

"Right, sir," I answered out of habit, and added the words on the slip of paper Stanislaus was shaking under my nose. "But couldn't we take a swipe at them first?"

"No time. This looks like the rear guard, and the main body is probably already infiltering through the wastelands. The town will have to shift for itself."

"Right, sir," I said again, and the radio clicked off, while the Slav went on grinning to himself. There wasn't a Torrakh within miles, and I knew it, but the General usually knew what he was doing; I wasn't so dumb I couldn't guess at it.

Stanislaus stretched his lank frame on the seat and nodded slowly. "Yeah, he's crazy, too—which is why he's a good General, 'Major. A few like him in higher places, and we'd be on Mars for another generation or so. Though it wouldn't make much difference in the long run... *Vanitas, vanitatum! There is no remembrance of former generations; neither shall there be any remembrance of the latter generations that are to come, among those that shall come after!...* That's Ecclesiastes, and worth more than the whole Book of Revelations."

"Or a dozen gloomy Slavs! There was talk of replacing the Fifth back when I was still a buck private. You should have been a preacher!"

"And in a way, I was, 'Major, —*lest evil days come and the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.* But a prophet's without honor, and as you say, I'm a gloomy Slav, even though they usually send replacements before they withdraw the Service. Well, lay on, MacDuff, for the greater glory of the Empire!"

I wasn't going to admit he had me, but I couldn't think of anything to say to that, so I shut up. The gloom-birds probably were around before that stuff was written, but civilization was still going on, though there were rumors about things back on Earth. But somehow, he always managed to make me start smelling old attics piled high with rubbish and beginning to mould. I turned and looked sideways, just as the first outskirts of an old canal swung into view.

They still call them canals, at least, though even the old time astronomers knew they weren't, before Mars was ever reached. But they must have been quite something, ten or fifteen thousand years ago, when the V'nothi built the big earthenware pipe-lines thousands of miles across the planet to section it and break up the sand-shifts that were ruining it. The big osmotic pumps were still working after a fashion, and there was a trickle of moisture flowing even yet, leaking—out into the bleeder lines and keeping the degenerate scrub trees going in fifty mile swaths around them.

THE V'NOTHI had disappeared before the Pyramids were put up, leaving only pictures of themselves in the ruins, looking like big, good-natured Vikings, complete to brawn and winged helmets. Their women folk must have been really something, even with fur all over them. Archeologists were still swearing every time they looked at those pictures and wondered what men on horseback were doing on Mars, and why no bones had ever been found! Some of them were even guessing that the V'nothi were Earthmen, maybe from an early peak of civilization we remembered in the Atlantis myths. But even if they were, there was a lot about them to drive a man nuts without worrying about their origin. If you ask me, they were just plain domesticated animals for some other race. Still, whoever the real boss was, it must have been quite a world in their time.

Even the canal-trees weren't natural; no other plants on Mars had bellows growing out of them to supercharge themselves with air, ozone, and traces of water vapor. Even over the drone of the tractor motors, I could hear the dull mutter of their breathing. And at sundown, when they all got together in one long, wild groan...well, when I first heard that, I began to have dreams about what the master race was, though I'm not exactly imaginative. Now I'm older, and just don't know, nor much care.

But the air was drier and thinner here, where they dessicated it, and Stanislaus was breathing it with a sort of moral rectitude about him, and nodding as if he liked it. "Dust of Babylon, eh, 'Major? They went up a long way once, further in some ways than we've climbed yet. In a thousand years or less, they pulled themselves up to our sciences, dropped them, and began working on what we'd call sheer magic. Sometimes, just thinking of what the records hint at scares me. They built themselves up to heaven, before the curse of bigness struck them down; and being extremists, it wasn't just a retreat, but a final rout."

"Meaning we're due for the same, 'Laus?" I always did like the way he pronounced his name, to rhyme with house.

"No, 'Major; we're not the same—we retreat. Ninevah, Troy, Rome—they've gone, but the periphery always stays to hibernate and come out into another springtime. An empire decays, but it takes a long time dying, and so far there's always been a certain amount passed on to the next surge of youthfulness. We've

developed a racial phoenix-complex. But of course you don't believe the grumblings of a gloomy Slav who's just bitter that his old empire is one of the later dust heaps?"

"No," I told him, "I don't."

He got up, knocking ashes off his parka with long, flickering fingers, and his voice held an irritating chuckle. "Stout fella, pride of the Empire, and all that! I congratulate you, 'Major, and damn it, I envy you!" And he was over the treads and running toward where the General's tractor had stopped, like a long, drawn-out cat. If he hadn't had the grace of a devil, his tongue would have gotten him spitted on a rapier years before.

I didn't dwell on even such pleasant thoughts. The men had stopped singing, and the first reaction of forced cheer was over. They were good joes, all in all, but after the long years at the post among the townspeople, they couldn't help being human. So I dropped back to the end of the line and kept my eyes peeled for any that might suddenly decide to develop engine trouble and lag behind. It's always the first day and night that are the hardest.

THEIR grumbling sounded normal enough when we pulled off the trail away from the tree-mutterings well after sundown, and I felt better; it's when they stop grousing that you have to watch them. All the same, I made them dig in a lot deeper than we needed, though it gets cold enough to freeze a man solid at night. They were sweating and stepping up the power in their aspirators before I was satisfied, and the berylite tent tops barely stuck up over the sand.

That would give them something trivial to beef about, and work their muscles down to good condition for sleeping. A good meal and a double ration of grog would finish the trick nicely, and I'd already given orders for that—which left me nothing to do but go in where Stanislaus was sprawled out on a cot, dabbling with his food and nodding in time to the tent aspirator's whine.

"Nice gadget, that—efficient," he commented, and the pinched grin was on his face. "Of course, the air's thick enough to breathe when a man's not working, but it's still a nice thing to have."

I knew what he meant, of course. The old timers had done a lot of foolish things, like baking out enough oxygen to keep the air pressure up almost to Earth normal. But it wasn't economical, and we were modern enough to get along without such nonsense. While I ate, I told him so, along with some good advice about how to get along with Emperors. Besides, it was a damnsight better aspirator than they'd had in the pioneer days.

I might as well have saved my breath. He waited until I ran down, and nodded amiably. "Absolutely, absolutely. And very well put, 'Major. As the Romans said when Theodoric's Gauls gave them orders, we're modern and up to date. Being of the present time, we're automatically modern. As for the Emperor, I wouldn't think of blaming him for what's inevitable, though I'd like a chance to argue the point with him, if I didn't have a certain fondness for my neck. Meantime, Mars rebuilds the seals in its houses and puts in little wind machines. *And behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind!* You really should read Ecclesiastes. Well, sleep tight, 'Major!"

He ducked under a blanket and was snoring in less than five minutes. I never could sleep well under a tin tent with a man who snores; and it was worse this time, somehow, though I finally did drop off.

We were dug out and ready to march in the morning when the General's scheme bore fruit; our deserters showed up over the dunes, hotfooting it down on us. They must have spotted my tractor, because they didn't waste any time in coming up to me. The damned fools! Naturally, they had to bring the two women along with them, instead of dumping them near town. They must have

been stinko drunk when they started, though the all-night drive had sobered them up—the drive plus half freezing to death and imagining Torrakhi behind every bush.

I'd never seen those two brigbirds salute with quite such gusto, though, as they hopped down, and Stanislaus' amused snort echoed my sentiments. But the big guy started the ball rolling, with only a dirty look at the Slav. "Sir! We couldn't help being *awol,* we..."

"Were caught by Torrakhi, of course," the General's smooth voice filled in behind me, and I stepped out of the picture on the double. "Very clever of you to escape, tractor and all. Unfortunately, there were no Torrakhi; the message your set was fitted to unscramble was a trap, based on the assumption that you'd rather take your chances with us than with a marauding band of nomads infiltering around you. I suppose I could have you shot; and if I hear one snivelling word from you, I will! Or I could take you back to Earth in chains."

His lips pressed out into a thin, white line, and his eyes flicked over to Stanislaus for a bare second. "You wouldn't like that. There's a new Emperor, not the soft one we had before. I served under him once... and I rather suspect he'd reward me for bringing you back with us, after the proper modern Imperial fashion of gratitude. However, for the good of the Fifth, you're already listed as fatalities. Sergeant, do you know these women?"

"Their names are on our books, sir!"

"Quite so. And they knew what they were mixed up in. Very well, leave them their side arms, but fill the tractor and lorry they returned with some of your men, and prepare to break camp. You've already forgotten all this; and that goes for the men, as well!" He swung on his heel and mounted his tractor without another look at the deserters, who were just beginning to realize what he'd meant.

STANISLAUS elected to ride with me as we swung back toward the canal road, watching the four until the dunes swallowed them. Then he shrugged and lit his cigarette. "Not orthodox, 'Major, but effective; you can stop worrying about desertions. And take it from me, it was the right thing to do; I happen to know—rather well in fact—why our precise and correct leader thought it wise to fake the books. But I won't bore you with it. As to those four—well, some of the pioneers were up against worse odds, but *de mortuis nil nisi bonum.* Nice morning, don't you think?"

It was, as a matter of fact, and we were making good time. The trail swung out, heading due south now, and away from the canal, and the sands were no longer cluttered with the queer pits always found around the canal-trees. By noon, we'd put a hundred more miles behind us, and the men were hardening into the swing of things, though they still weren't doing the singing I like to hear on the march—the good, clean filth that's somehow the backbone of Service morale. I sent a couple of tractors out to scout, just to break the monotony, though there wouldn't be anything to see so near the end of the desert.

Surprisingly, however, they hadn't been gone ten minutes when the report came back: Torrakhi to the left flank! A moment later, we were snapping into a tight phalanx and hitting up a rise where we could see; but by then we knew that there was no danger. They were just a small band, half a mile away, jolting along on their lama-mounts at an easy lope. Then they spotted us and beat back behind the dunes and out of sight. A small marauding band, turning back north from sacking some fool outlier's farm, probably.

But it was unusual to see them so far south. We'd never been able to eliminate them entirely, any more than the V'nothi before us had, but we'd kept the wild quasi-human barbarians in line, pretty much. And

now we were swinging back to the trail again, leaving them unchecked to grow bold in raiding; there wasn't anything else we could do, since they hadn't attacked and we were under Imperial seal. Well, maybe the Second Command would get them for us some time. I hoped so.

Stanislaus might say what he would, but he was still Service, and it had hit him, too. "Notice the long rifle they pulled? What make would you say?"

"Renegade pirates on Callisto, it looked like, at a guess. But the exiles couldn't get past the Out Fleet to trade with Torrakhi!"

He flipped his cigarette away and turned to face me, dead serious and quiet about it. "The Out Fleet's just a propaganda myth, 'Major! They pulled it back before I—uh, left Earth!"

He couldn't know that, and I had no business believing him; yet somehow, I was sure he did know, and whatever else he was, he was not a liar. But that would mean that the Earth-Mars trade...

"Exactly," he said, as if he'd read the thought. "And now we're going back to help put down a minor little uprising in the Empire, so I hear. Write your own ticket."

But even if it were true, it didn't prove anything. Sure, it looked bad, but I've learned you can't judge from half-knowledge. A lot of times when I've gone out swearing at the orders, I've come back alive because they weren't the kind I'd have given. Heck, even if the mesotron rifle was Callistan, there was no telling how old it was; maybe they'd pulled the Out Fleet back for the second reason that it wasn't needed. But it did look odd, their keeping up the pretense.

WE CAMPED that night at an old abandoned fort dating back to pioneer days, and then shoved on in the morning through little hamlets and the beginning of settled land. The people looked fairly hard and efficient, but it was pleasant, after the desert, and the men seemed more cheerful. Here the road was kept surfaced, and the engines went all out. A little later, we took the grousers off, and by the time another night had passed, we were in well-settled country. From then on, it was all soft going and the miles dropped off as regular as clockwork, though I missed the swish of the sand under the treads.

As we went on, the land and the people got softer, with that comfortable look I'd missed up where Torrakhi are more than things to scare children with. And the farms were bigger and better kept. For that matter, I couldn't see a man working with a rifle beside him. The Service had done that. When we first hit Mars, in the pioneer days, there hadn't been a spot on its face where a man could close both eyes. Now even the kids went running along the road alone. Oh, sure, there were some abandoned villas, here and there, but I don't think the nobles were too much missed.

And that was civilization and progress, whatever Stanislaus thought about it. Let them pull the Out Fleet back and call in the Fifth. As long as Mars had spots on it like this, it didn't look too bad for the Empire. I wanted to throw it in the Slav's face, but I knew it wouldn't do any good. He'd have some kind of answer. Better let sleeping dogs lie.

And besides, he was riding with the General again, and even at night he was busy writing in some big book and not paying attention to anything else. In a way, it was all to the good. Still, I dunno. At least, when he was spouting out his dogma, I had a chance to figure up some kind of answer to myself. There wasn't much I could do about the look on his face.

But I noticed that we always seemed to make camp about the time we were well away from the cities, and it was something to think over, along with the guff that had begun among the men. It looked as if the General meant to keep us away from any rumors going around, and that was odd; ordinarily civilian scuttlebut means nothing to the Service.

And now that the novelty had

worn off, there was something wrong about the number of farms we'd pass that were abandoned and that had been for a long time. There were little boarded-up stores in some of the villages, and once we went by a massive atomic by-products plant, dead and forgotten. And the softness on the people's faces began to look less pretty; one good-sized band of Torrakhi could raise hob with a whole county, even without meso-tron rifles from Callisto.

THE ONE time I did speak to a native, I had no business doing it. We'd been rolling along, with me at the rear for the moment, and there was this fine-looking boy of about twelve walking along the road. What got me was the song he was singing and the way he came to a Service salute at the sight of me. Well, the General wasn't in sight, and the kid took my slowing up as a hint to hop onto the lug rail.

"Fifth, isn't it, sir?"

"Right. But where the deuce did you learn that ditty and the proper way to address a non-com?"

He grinned the way healthy kids know how, before they grow old enough to forget. "Gramps was in the Fifth when they raised the seige of Bharene, sir, and he told me all about it before he died. Gee, it must have been great when he was young!"

"And now?"

"Aw, now they say you're going back to Earth, and Gramps wouldn't have liked that. He was a Martian, like me... Look, I live up there, so I gotta go. Thanks for the lift, Sergeant!"

So even the kids knew we were going back, and now we were just another Service Command, instead of the backbone of Mars. Strange, I hadn't thought of what it would mean, going back where people had never heard of us before. But I could see where the General was right in not letting us mix with people here. Damn it, we were still the Fifth, and nothing could change that, Mars or Earth, Emperor or Torrakh!

We didn't spend too much time looking at the country after that, though it grew even prettier as we went on. The tractors were beginning to carbon up under the fuel we had to requisition, and we were busy nursing them along and watching for trouble. At the post, we'd had our own purifying plant to get the gum out of the plant fuels, but here we had to take pot luck. And it was a lot worse than I'd expected. But then, a man tends to gloss over his childhood and think things were better then. I dunno. Maybe it had always been that bad.

Anyhow, we made it, in spite of a few breakdowns. It was dusk when the lights of Marsport showed up, and we went limping through the outskirts. When we hit the main drag, a motorcop ran ahead of us with his siren open, though there wasn't any need. I couldn't help wondering where the cars were, and how they managed to dig up so many bicycles. We must have looked like the devil, since we'd pushed too fast to bother much with shining up, but there were some cheers from the crowds that assembled, and a few women's faces with the look of not having seen uniforms in years. The men woke up at that, yelling the usual things, but I could feel their disappointment in the city.

Then we halted, and Stanislaus came back, while a fat and stuffy little man in noble's regalia strode up to the General's tractor, fairly sniffing the dirt on our gear as he came. Well, he could have used a better shave himself, and a little less hootch would have improved his dignity. The Slav chuckled. "Methinks this should be good, unless the O.M. has lost his touch. Flip the switch, 'Major; I left the radio turned on."

But no sound came out of it except a surprised grunt from the official as he looked at the odd-patterned ring on the General's finger. I never knew what it stood for, but all the air went out of the big-shot's sails, and he couldn't hand over the official message fast enough after that. He was mopping sweat from his face when the crowd swallowed him.

I've seen a busted sergeant act that way when he suddenly remembered he was pulling rank he no longer had.

"Don't bother cutting off yet, Sergeant," the radio said quietly, and it was my turn to grin. Stanislaus should have known better than to try putting anything over. "Umm. I'm going to be tied up with official business at the Governor's, so you'll go ahead. Know where the auxiliary port is? Good. Bivouac there, and put the men to policing themselves and the hangars. No passes. That's all."

HE SWITCHED to a waiting car, leaving the tractor to his driver, and we went on again, out through the outskirts and past the main space-port; that was dark, and I couldn't tell much about it, but I remembered the mess of the old auxiliary field. They'd built it thirty miles out in barren land to handle the overflow during the old colonizing period, and it had been deserted and weed-grown for years, with hangars falling apart. It was worse than I'd remembered, though there were some lights on and a group of Blue Guards to let us in and direct us to the left side of the field.

Some clearing had been done, but there was work enough to keep us all busy as beavers, and there would be for days, if we stayed that long. At least it gave me a good excuse for announcing confinement to grounds, though they took it easier than I'd expected; it seemed they already knew in some way. And at last I was finished with giving orders and had a chance to join the Slav in inspecting the ships I'd already noticed down at the end of the field.

I'd seen the like of the double-turret cruiser before, but the two big ones were different, even in the dim lights of the field. They were something out of the history books, and no book could give any idea of their size. The rocket crews about them, busy with their own affairs, were like ants running around a sky-scrapper by comparison. Either could have held the whole Command and left room for cargo besides.

"So we're waiting for the Second Command, 'Laus?"

He jerked his head back from a reverent inspection of the big hulks and nodded at me slowly. "You improve, 'Major, though you forgot to comment on the need of a cruiser between Mars and Earth... Two hundred years! And they're still sounder than the hunk of junk sent out to protect them. There was a time when men knew how to build ships—and how to use them. Now there are only four left out of all that were built. Any idea where the other two are?"

"Yeah." I'd failed to recognize them because of their size, but it hadn't been quite dark enough to conceal them completely. "Back at the other port, picking up the South Commands. Damn it, 'Laus, did you have to infect me with your pessimism?"

"You're going back to Earth, 'Major," he answered, as if that were explanation enough. "The optimist sees the doughnut, the pessimist, the hole. And you get a better view of things through a hole than through a hunk of sweetened dough. And as Havelock Ellis put it, the place where optimism most flourished is the lunatic asylum. Come on back and I'll lend you Ecclesiastes while I finish my book."

And I was just dumb enough to read it. But I might have had the same nightmares anyway. I'd gotten a good look at the faces of the rocket gang.

In the morning, I was too busy bossing the stowing of our gear to do much thinking, though. Even with maps of the corridors, I'd have been lost in the ship without the help of one of the pilots, a bitter-faced young man who seemed glad to fill his time, but who refused to talk beyond the bare necessities. When the General came back at noon, the men were all quartered inside, except for those who were detailed to help load the collection of boxes that began to come from Marsport.

He nodded curt approval and went

to the radio in his cabin. And about an hour later, I looked up to see the Second Command come in and go straight to the second ship, a mile away. They could have saved themselves the trouble, as far as I was concerned; I had no desire to compare notes with the other group. But I guess it was better for the men, and it was a lot easier than posting guards over night to see they didn't mix. A hell of a way to run the Service, I thought; but of course, it wasn't the Service anymore—just the Second and Fifth Commands, soon to be spread around on Earth!

IT WAS after taps when they brought the civilians aboard, but I was still enjoying the freedom of second in command, and I was close enough to get a good look at them and the collection of special tools they were bringing along with the rest of their luggage. I'd always figured the technical crafts came out from automatic Earth to the outlands where their skills were still needed. But that seemed to be just another sign that the old order was changing. I turned to make talk with the pilot who was beside me, and then thought better of it.

But for once, he was willing to break his silence, though he never took his eyes off the little group that was filing in. "They're needed, Sergeant! Atomic technicians are in demand again, along with plutonium. That's what the rear trucks are carrying, and they'll be loading it between hulls tonight—all that can be arranged safely. Of course, I'm not supposed to tell you. But I was born here, and it's not like the last job we had, ferrying out the Venus Commands. Care to join me in getting drunk?"

It was an idea. Plutonium is valuable in particular only for bombs, for which it's still the best material. And atom bombs are the messiest, lousiest, and most inefficient weapons any fighting man ever swore at. They're only good for ruining the land until you can't finish a decent mopping-up, and poisoning the atmosphere until your own people begin dying. Not a single one had been dropped in the five centuries since we came up with the superior energy weapons. So now we were carrying the stuff back to Earth, where they already had the accumulated waste from all their piles.

But I caught a signal from the car the General was using as I turned, and I changed my mind. I was in the mood for Stanislaus now, and whiskey's a pretty poor mental cathartic, anyway. This time I could see that the information I poured out at him wasn't something he already knew.

So. *Even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.*" He let it sink in slowly, then shrugged. "Well, maybe it'll be faster, that way. But it won't matter to me. I'm due in Marsport to attend my funeral—a lovely casket, I understand, though it's a pity we're so pressed for time I can't have military honors. Only the simple dignity of civilian rites. Thought you might like to bid me fond adieu, for old times' sake."

"Yeah, sure. And bring me back a bottle of the same."

He shook his head gently, and the darned fool's voice was serious. "I wish I could, 'Major. I'd like nothing better than having you along to listen to my theories of our racial phoenix-complex. But I've done the next best thing in leaving the book that's my labor of love in your cabin. All right, I was ribbing you, and I'm being transferred out to the Governor's service by special orders. Does that make sense to you?"

It did, put that way. It meant that after all the years of wishing he'd clam up, I was going to miss him plenty, now that I'd been converted, and probably sit alone biting my tongue to keep from spouting the same brand of pessimism. But I wasn't much good at saying it, and he cut me off in the middle.

"Then bite it. That stuff won't go, back there, though you're better off for having found out in advance.

[*Turn To Page 97*]

Two Worlds ★★ ★★ For One

by George O. Smith

(author of "Dynasty of the Lost")

Professor Milton had a famous plan for ending the strife between the Western and Eastern world — split the earth in two, literally, and let each side go its way, according to its own ideals. And the trouble was that Milton could actually do what he planned!

WITHOUT preamble, the door swung open with a rush and a man ran into the office. He was waving a paper in one hand, but this was not the only evidence of his excitement; aside from the waved paper and his obviously breathless appearance, the man spoke as soon as he was within sight of the other man behind the desk.

"Professor Milton has resigned!"

The man behind the desk smiled resignedly. "Don't be too concerned, Doctor Harris. Professor Milton has resigned before; he always comes back."

Doctor Harris shook his head. His agitation did not diminish, despite the calm composure of the man behind the desk. "Doctor Edwards," he explained, "you don't really understand. He—"

"Look, Harris," replied Doctor Edwards, dropping the formality of title, "is there anything we can do about it?"

"No," admitted Harris uncomfortably. "But you don't know what he'll be doing next." He handed the paper to the quiet man behind the desk. Doctor Edwards read:

Dear Doctor Edwards:

It has come to my attention that the world is in a high state of confusion. Under these trying circumstances, I feel moved to do something constructive about it.

You will understand that any honest attempt to eliminate the state of strife that exists is most difficult under my present affiliations with this Institution. Ergo, I make formal resignation, knowing that a request for even a brief leave of absence would not be granted.

Have no lasting fear. I may return once I have accomplished the reinstatement of peace and quiet in this troubled world.

Sincerely yours

Paul Monroe Milton, Ph.D.

Doctor Edwards shrugged. "This time it is the state of the world," he said. His voice held a twinge of amusement.

Harris gasped. "You're not really worried!"

"Of course not. There is no single man on earth capable of untangling the mess of the century."

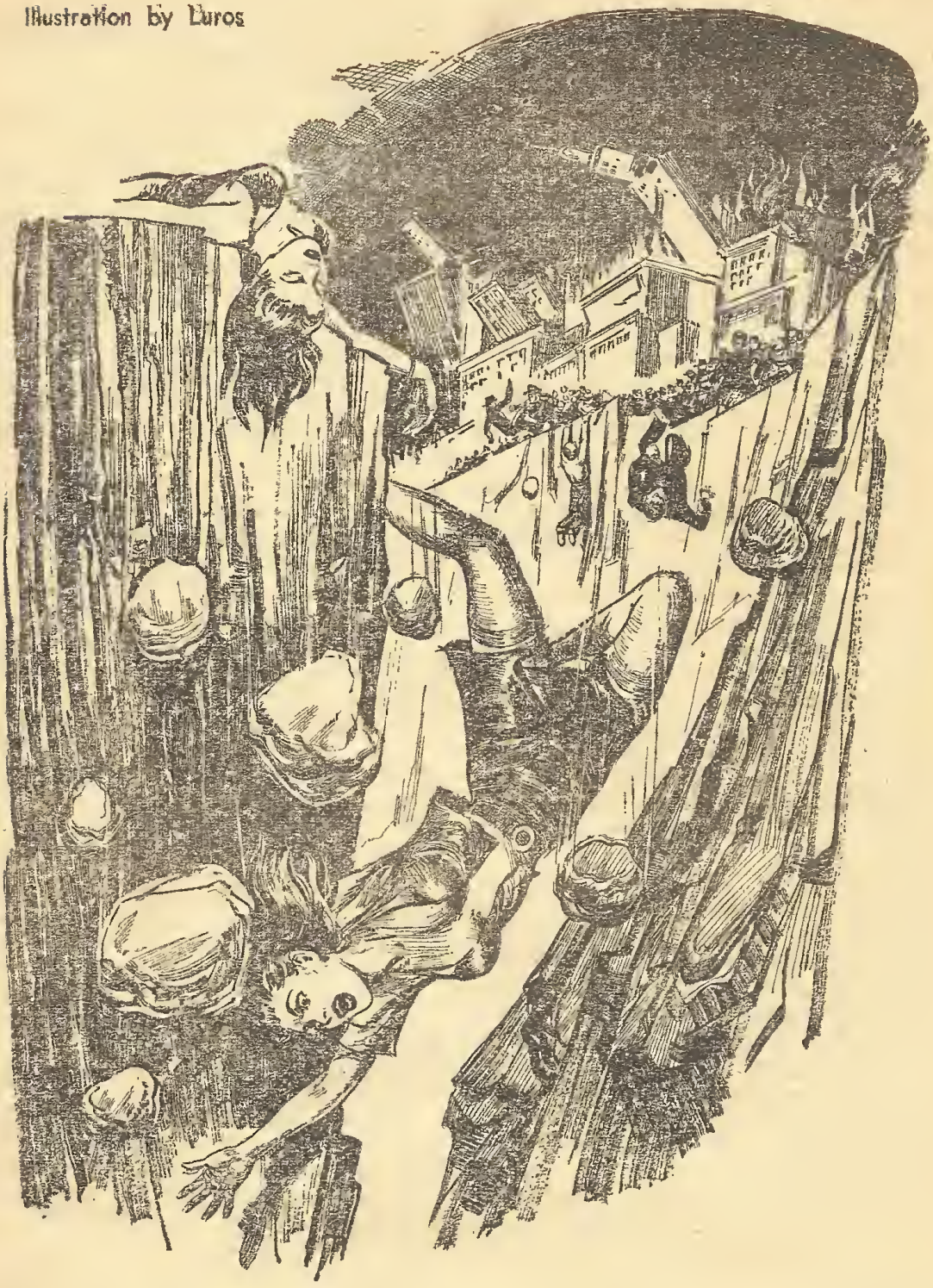
"I wonder," objected Harris.

"Why?"

"Professor Milton is a literal-minded genius, and a bit of a screwball. A more brilliant man has seldom existed on this earth—but he reminds me somewhat of a powerful machine running wild; neither he nor a machine has much judgment."

"But what are you worried about?"

Illustration by Duros



"The shock of splitting the earth would leave no city standing; huge crevices would be formed, and no living thing would remain.

"Remember the time he said 'Nothing is impossible!' and was instantly told to try scratching a match on a bar of soap?"

Edwards laughed heartily. "You bet!" he chuckled. "Milton invented a safety match that would light only when scratched on a soft, moist bar of soap. Nowhere else."

"Uh-huh," drawled Harris. "And a bit of common sense added to that kind of genius might have brought forth a real safety match that might be worth millions to the institution. What I'm a bit worried about is just what angle his rather literal mind will follow."

"No matter. We can stop him once we know—and Professor Milton is not an unknown figure; we'll wait and watch carefully."

Doctor Harris nodded slowly. He was sensible enough to know that the Professor was missing completely and no matter how dangerous it might be, nothing could be done until Professor Milton did something to smoke himself out into the open. He left Doctor Edwards' office determined to keep a close eye on newspaper and a sharp ear on the radio commentators.

* * *

THE GENERAL Assembly of the United Nations came to order after prolonged applause. The Chairman nodded genially and spoke into the microphones on his desk; his words were translated for those who did not understand his tongue, but no man present was unaware of the importance of the figure beside him. Pictures have no tongue and Professor Milton was genius.

"Gentlemen," said the Chairman, "this may seem irregular. However, Professor Milton comes before us to explain a plan he has evolved for the continued peace and satisfaction of the world—a world made desparate by continued disagreement. We need no pre-vues of his plan because we know that he Milton seldom presents any solution that is not workable. I relinquish the rostrum to Professor Paul Monroe Milton!"

More thunderous applause.

"Gentlemen of the United Nations," said Milton into the microphones, "it is not my purpose to decide who is right in these everlasting disagreements. Without a doubt each side has its own personal reasons for believing as it does, otherwise there would be no agreement.

"However it stands that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics wants to rule a certain part of the world in their own manner—which is anathema to the United States of America. Similarly, the United States of America prefers to see the world operating under a manner favorable to *its* principles of Democracy.

"Because of this no agreement has been reached. An impasse has obtained for years.

"My plan is simple. Let us divide the world into two equal parts and each go our way, ruling each according to our own ideals. I offer you two worlds for one!"

Professor Milton seated himself.

The General Assembly was quiet for a moment; then all broke into a roar of scornful laughter. Minutes later the Chairman succeeded in restoring order. He said: "I fear that Professor Milton does not quite understand. My dear Professor Milton, we agree in the whole. The main argument is not that we should do this; the question at hand is how to get along after the world is divided."

"Simple," said the professor. "It is—"

He was interrupted by more roars of laughter.

"Fools! Idiots!" he stormed. The power of his voice stilled the laughter. "You think it will not work?"

More laughter, and an undercurrent of remarks like: "Choose up sides like a ball game"; "Make it cricket, old chap." "Match you for the Dardanelles, Commissar,"; "Swap you Java for—"

"Imbeciles," yelled Professor Milton angrily. "Must I demonstrate?"

"Just how do you propose to effect this division?" asked the Chairman sarcastically.

"By application of gravitic field theory," snapped Professor Milton.

The Russian Delegate arose, was

recognized, and said: "Professor Milton's suggestion sounds uncomfortable. I fully believe that no one will find fault with Russia if I exercise my power of veto on this suggestion." He seated himself among wild cheers, laughter, and applause.

In the excitement, Professor Milton left.

* * *

CHARLES Ingalls of the F.B.I. smiled tolerantly. "I see no reason to be upset," he said.

Doctors Edwards and Harris shook their heads in unison. "You don't understand," explained Edwards. —Recall his words?"

"Of course."

"And you apply no importance to them?"

"His theory sounds reasonable. Let Russia run her section—"

Harris snorted excitedly; he slapped the newspaper with the back of his hand. "Divide the world," he said, his voice rising in pitch. "Have you any idea of what that would mean?"

"Why—it still sounds sensible."

"Professor Milton is literal-minded to the extreme. Professor Milton is sheer genius— That is why he is employed in our institution."

"Then," snapped Ingalls, "why don't you keep him there?"

"We'd like to. The trouble is that Milton *is* genius and as such quite important to certain factions. His ability to solve problems hitherto unsoluable make him valuable. One of the problems he has encountered and solved is the way to leave our institution at any time. That is why we treat him as an employee instead of an inmate."

"So about this dividing business?"

Harris shook his head. "When Milton said 'divide the world into two parts,' he meant that literally. He is quite capable of devising some means of dividing the world astronomically."

Ingalls laughed. "Impossible!" he chuckled.

"Several years ago Professor Milton was in need of some dye for some obscure purpose. One of his assistants made a wisecrack to the effect that if Professor Milton was so smart, why couldn't he filter the dye out of ink and use that. Milton devised a filter capable of separating the dye from ink, and used it. So far the filter is useless for anything else but it will certainly remove the color from a bottle of ink, leaving the stuff in two useless quantities."

"Interesting, but—"

"Astronomically, the idea of separating the world into two hemispheres is disastrous."

"WHY?" ASKED Ingalls. "I know little of astrology."

Edwards glared at him. "Not astrology; astronomy. Astrophysics or celestial mechanics. Your half-apple of a world is unstable astronomically. Gravity would set in unfavorably upon the instant of division and separation and the half-apple would collapse into two smaller spheres, gradually assuming true spherical shapes in thousands of years as the rocks cold-flowed. But for the moment, the shock and the immediate crack-up would leave no city standing; huge crevices would be formed, and no living thing to remain. Understand, I'm a doctor of medicine and not an astrophysicist. My description may err but I can guarantee that the results would be disastrous. I suggest that if you don't believe me, call one of the big brains at Mount Palomar; they'll tell you the details."

"It sounds impossible. But if the man is a maniac—"

"Not a maniac," objected Doctor Harris. "Just completely single-track, literal-minded. Genius without judgement. Cares nothing for any problem that has not caught his fancy but will pursue anything he likes to the bitter end. Trying to keep up with what he fancies is like predicting which way a bar of bath soap will squirt when you step on it inadvertently. He's—"

"Enough! Convinced or not, I'll aid you to re-collect the Professor. How shall we go about it?"

"You're the man-hunter," said Edwards with a smile. "How do you go about it?"

"Just what kind of thing will this

mad genius use to divide the earth?" asked Ingalls.

"Lord knows," grunted Harris. "Why?"

"I was suggesting that we keep watch over the sale of certain materials."

"Make it a watch over *all* materials," snorted Edwards. "Field theory is an abstract subject and he'll try to reduce it to practise, I'd guess. Mechanical division is impossible, I'd state flatly. Gravity holds the earth together; slicing it would do no good for it would cold-pressure weld together once the knife passed. But with some sort of field to divide and direct the forces of gravity— Well, your guess is as good as mine."

"Fine," said Ingalls sourly. "So we have the job of locating one man in the earth who might be capable of ruining it, but we don't know how." He snorted. "Could one man do it?"

"We're here because we think so; he's done some mighty impossible things so far. Few of them are known for security reasons. Actually, though it is not admitted, Professor Milton is the man whose calculations made the original uranium pile practical. He took theory and reduced theoretical equations to practical calculations before they tried it out at the University of Chicago. It was some of his calculations that—stolen, of course—put the rocket experts on the track of developing the V-2. So—?"

"Um. I begin to see."

* * *

PROFESSOR Moreiko of the Moscow Academy of Science shook his head heavily. "Ridiculous," he said in a good grade of English into the telephone. "Ridiculous, my comrade. No earthquake fault-lines exist there."

Ingalls, on the other end of the telephone, said: "We know that; but that is where we anticipate trouble."

"What manner of trouble. You do not expect—?"

"I have called every seismographic station on earth," explained Ingalls. "Or I should say that I am calling every station. Professor Milton—"

"Ah, the great Professor Milton! He is—?"

"Loose again," grunted Ingalls.

"With what purpose?"

"Professor Milton has decided to divide the earth so that Russia can run her half while we—"

"Divide the earth!" exploded Professor Moreiko loudly, nearly damaging the telephone earpiece and Ingalls' ear at the same time. "You Americans!... He is yours! I will help, but you must stop him!"

"Okay," replied Ingalls. "Just keep an eye on the district I mentioned. According to the big globe here, that is the best place to divide the world so that each of us can have an equitable half—"

"And a precious lot it will do us." snorted Moreiko. "What a completely outrageous idea!"

"Well, I'm told he is the guy to do it."

Moreiko spluttered for a moment. Then his voice became sober. "Had any other man on earth made that statement I would have scoffed," he said. "But Professor Milton— American, I am alarmed!"

The connection was broken as the Russian hung up in an excited mood.

* * *

DAYS PASSED. Days in which men poured over shipping statements, pondering their relative importance and seeking some clue of strange shipments to a strange location. A huge airliner was stolen; the seismographs of the world were still save for their usual reportings; for three days all radio was killed by energetic cracklings of static which appeared to be completely non-directional in source. The Department of Terrestrial Magnetism in Washington reported shiftings of the lines of equal deviation from true north and a change in the vertical component as well but their measurements were insufficiently precise to pin the source of trouble down to more than several thousand square miles.

Twenty days after the Professor had resigned from the Institution, all the world's seismographs reported a

serious temblor. Directionally, it was tracked down, and the calculations indicated a fairly straight line of fault.

The fault was a vertical Great Circle of the earth dividing the earth into two hemispheres.

Somewhere along this Great Circle must be Professor Milton, reasoned the many agencies seeking him. The beat the Circle from pole to pole and though finding one man in the wilderness of earth might be impossible, every available man was seeking him actively. Locating Milton was inevitable—providing Milton did not accomplish his division of the earth first.

Ten days later the earth shook again, and people looked at one another in fear.

"We must find him!" stormed Ingalls.

Edwards and Harris nodded unhappily. Edwards added: "He's down there, somewhere."

Ingalls looked out of the plane window at a million square miles of glaring ice. "A mote in the Grand Canyon of the Colorado," he grunted.

Professor Moreiko shook his head. "All Americans are crazy," he stated.

"No," grunted Edwards. "Only some of them." Moreiko laughed bitterly. Days upon end of flying over the ice was tiring to them all.

It was, however, only a matter of time before the elusive Professor Milton was located. And hours later, Moreiko gave a shout as he pointed towards a small building squat upon the ice with a tall steel tower beside it. They landed beside the building, and climbed out of the plane worriedly. Whether the professor was armed bothered them quite a bit.

PROFESSOR Milton was not armed, nor was he resentful at being found. "Greetings," he boomed genially. "You are the first."

"Why did you hide?" demanded Edwards.

"Hide? I was not hiding. I merely came to the proper place for the division of the earth. I'd have mentioned it, but apparently no one was interested; I was forced to go on my own, so to speak."

"You realize the importance of this?"

"Of course," smiled Professor Milton whimsically. "Once this division takes place, there will be no cause for argument."

"Nor anybody to argue," pointed Edwards.

"Small matter. Russia wants—"

"Might I speak for Russia?" asked Professor Moreiko.

"Ah, Moreiko! So glad to see you. Of course you may speak."

"Professor Milton, I tell you that neither Russia nor the United States is pleased with this proposition of yours."

"Why not?" asked Milton childishly. "It seems equitable."

"It is equitable, but truly not practical."

"No?" boomed Milton, reaching for a large lever protruding from a panel. "I shall show you. I—"

"Please consider first," objected Moreiko.

"But why? Your ideology is at cross purposes with ours; you go your way and we'll go ours."

"Dead!" snapped Moreiko.

"Better dead," replied Milton, "than constant strife."

"You realize that you will kill every man on earth?"

"Not at all... Just a few. The others will find life difficult for a bit but most will survive."

"But—"

Milton stood to his full height which was imposing. "I care little for that," he boomed. "I am laughed at; I am made a fool of; I am ridiculed. I am told that my theories are impossible. I shall show them all, though they die in the attempt!"

"And you yourself."

"And if I do—if we do—it will prove my theories sound. Russia and the United States may each have their half, separated by millions of miles of space where neither can harm the other."

"It will not work," said Moreiko. Edwards and Harris groaned. Telling Professor Milton that something will

[*Turn To Page 93*]

Barrier of Dread

by Judith Merril

The common fears had long been vanished; humanity lived in peace and perpetual progress — but there was a lurking fear beneath the surface that became a barrier that none could scale.

IT WOULD have been a perfect day for the Managing Director, but his wife spoiled it for him. Sarise had a way of saying unexpected things; it was half her charm. This time as they settled into the cushions on the moving ramp that would take them into the space ship from the great amphitheatre where the ceremonies had been held, she looked worried. That is to say, she would have looked worried if it were possible that a mature woman in perfect health of body and mind, with nothing to desire, could have looked worried.

"It's too fast," was all she said, but Dangret had lived with her long enough to know what she meant.

"I can't quite make up my mind whether you're a throwback or just an incurable romantic," he told her in a tone that might have been angry had he understood the nature of anger. But it was as long since humans had had cause to understand anger, as it was since they had known reason for worry. He was, however, not joking. Sarise held a greater fascination for Dangret than any of his earlier wives, because in twenty-five years he had been completely unable to settle this problem to his own satisfaction.

She was unperturbed. "It's too fast," she repeated. "No one man should have the glory of opening two galaxies during his Directorship. It's..."

"Certainly this feeling of...what did they call it...guilt?...in pleasure or glory is more of an atavism than a romantic notion. Sarise, do you seriously mean..."

"Yes I do, and it's neither atavism *nor* romanticism," his wife retorted; "it's common sense. I don't know the figures. That's your business. But I know as well as you do that the maximum percentage that choose for exploration is lower than the number you'll be needing if settlement speeds up at the rate it is."

"That takes care of itself," he told her. "You know the children of settlers have the highest inclination for exploration. The system works because these factors *do* level out."

Sarise had made up her mind. "Try it on your calkers," she tossed back, reaching for the portable sensory recorder she always kept near at hand. She began to finger the controls, making a record of her ideas before she lost them. "I'm going to do a composition on it, anyhow." She punched a key vehemently. "And if the images I get out of this set of ideas don't make a real fear sensation, I'll give up composing for good."

"If they do," he laughed, "I'll probably ban it. Nobody's done a successful fear-image in *my* lifetime, and I'm not sure it's a good idea for anyone to do it."

Sarise was no longer interested. The section of the ramp that held their cushions had left the moving carrier and deposited them in their own quarters on the flagship that would take them back to Earth, where, tradition decreed, the Director must live—despite its many inconveniences.

DANGRET was thoughtful as he watched his wife become more absorbed in the machine that would eventually produce a combination of sound, light, and emotion as effective as anything else being done in the universe. His eyes wandered over to the far wall of the room where a huge fresco depicted the underlying



Illustration by Luros

Dangret set the robot to remove the painting.

pulse of their age. It wasn't supposed to be scientific; it showed a suited man—without a helmet—and a lovely woman, without any protection other than the modern trappings she wore, leaping off the rear tubes of a rocket ship, the kind that was outmoded in Dangret's grandfather's times. Flames in space surrounded them, and another ship, apparently burning, could be seen in the background. There was no fear on the faces of the pair. To Dangret and to the artist who had done the work, the fresco symbolized the limitless possibilities of human will, and the endless expansion of human destiny.

He looked back at Sarise; he had originally made up his mind to meet this woman when he heard her first composition, and he had realized when he suggested their union that she might leave him physically, at any time for her work. Dangret was accustomed to it, and, like others of his day, found the spectacle of another being absorbed in creative activity second best only to the sensation of that absorbtion within his own person.

Now, however, he was not as much concerned with Sarise or her composition as he was with the casual remark that had preceded it. It was no serious problem, of course; it would probably have some use-value as the basis for an effective image, but it could be solved, if the matter became sufficiently acute, by the manufacture of explorer-robots. As a matter of fact, the calkers had tabulated the percentages sometime back, and had automatically begun designing the new type androids. But her "Too fast, too fast," had moved something in him—possibly, he thought, amused at his own reaction, an atavism of his own.

He went to sleep with the thought still on his mind, a nagging little thought that pulled at him and wouldn't let him be. Sarise's explanation was wrong, but there was something. It *was* too fast. Why, why?

In the morning the little nagging concern had not left him, nor did it through the day of welcomes and further ceremonies on Earth. Dangret was a wise man, and two hundred years in his job had taught him much. He knew better than to ignore or suppress the thought; something was wrong, somehow, and he had to find out what it was. *Too fast...*

He tried the sensory images. Some of Sarise's compositions, he had found, could clear almost all impressions from his conscious mind and leave the subconscious open for exploration. He had banished this sort of troublesome unresolved thought before. This time, even the images failed. He tried another method, something he had not done for many years now, not since he heard the first Sarise poem.

Human history had a well-defined logic of its own, a logic not entirely within the power of the calkers to compute, but sometimes more directly ascertainable by the natural curves of instinct. When he was younger, and troubled by ideas not clear enough to hand over to calkers for solution, Dangret had had a composition created for himself, one that would allow him, in a few hours, to re-live the path of galactic conquest, empire, bureaucracy, and managership. The piece was designed to sweep broad outlines at the beginning, and narrow down, as it proceeded, till at the end it was done in such detail that it was necessary to add to it yearly to keep it complete.

Now he had the composition brought to his own room, announced that he would be unavailable for the next hours, and settled down in the almost-severe white-painted simplicity of his personal quarters, to review the past, and discover if he could what factor of the present could menace the future.

It was a long while since he had sensed the piece, and now he participated almost physically in its drama. He swept in ridiculously ornate flowing robes beside the first World Emperor, the man who had bound the Earth into a unit with which to conquer space. With the early explorers, he suffered the hardships of unperfected atomics, and landed beside them on the first extra-solar planet. He followed the search for inhabited planets, and felt

the strange combination of loneliness and power that had spread over Earth as it became clear that life, as life on Earth was defined, was a galactic freak. Nowhere else had there been a combination of environmental factors that made large and complex life-forms an evolutionary desideratum.

But for the conquering Earthmen, there had to be subjects of conquest —so they manufactured them. Robots tilled the soil on those planets where it was rich, dug wealth from the ground where rock and ore prevailed, built fantastically luxurious palaces for earthmen on the best-suited orbs.

DANGRET watched and lived with the triumph of a world as the empire spread over a galaxy, and stopped. He fought, first with the robots, ancestors, (if the term can be used) of his calkers, and then with the humans, in the three great revolts. He lived, with other Earthmen, in dread of a mechanistic mastery of life, when it was finally established that the robots had learned the secret of "reproduction," and he was present at the peace treaty, when only the humans' superior will to live and rule won them the slight edge of victory.

He was one with the first Bureaucrats, who established the principle of Dynamic Exchange, and lived with the men who guided each new type of robot, adapted to work on a particular planet, from the initial slave-labor stage, through the long haul to self-sufficient technology and self-manufactory. And he was there when the first calker, the ultimate design of human and robot cooperation, discovered the trick of crossing inter-galactic space.

The calkers killed the Bureaucracy; the bureaucrats' own theories of dynamics, really, killed it, but intergalactic commerce finished it. The last pressure had been removed; the robots had taken from man all the burdens of unpleasant labor. Earthmen were fed, clothed, housed, and given all their simpler physical pleasures mechanically. The most complicated of the mechanical aides were sent out to prepare new territories for their Earth masters, and when, finally, other galaxies were opened for settlement, there was no need for any human to be put upon in any way by other humans. The enormous strides in medicine, and the lessening of the burden of labor had produced a constantly increasing population, and had the resultant numbers been confined, even in the extent of a single galaxy, there might still have been cause for strife, jealousy, and hate.

But when every man could have his own robot-manned planet if he chose, when all those who wished to govern and dominate could; all those who loved adventure and exploration could have it; all those who wanted nothing but creative or intellectual activity were free to devote themselves to it, *and there was no limit*— the very nature of man changed. Dangret traveled with the first crew members to the second galaxy and sank back into his cushions as he experienced the relief that flooded Earthmen on all the inhabitable planets as endless space opened up to accompany endless service.

He himself today had opened the seventh galaxy; as a boy he had known the eighth Manager, who opened the Fourth Galaxy. The system, by that time, had been established. Calkers designed new machines, new androids, to fit the new conditions of each planet, as soon as the first explorers brought back their reports. Some were to be prepared for human habitation; others would be colonized by robots, and utilized as sources of raw material. Humanity lived and prospered on the slight difference between what the robots produced, and what, in the end, they consumed, and the greater the expansion, the greater the total sum of that slight difference.

But the system was benevolent, for anything apart from benevolence was no longer acceptable to what had been called "human nature." It had become horribly clear, during the robotic revolutions, that the intangibles that change a group of men into a mob could change a collection of robots into a society, with a function-

ing mind and even emotion-pattern of its own. Men, happy and satisfied men, to whom exploitation was impossible, were faced with choice of giving up their robots or keeping them "happy." With the struggle of those men, Dangret suffered, and with them, he chose the only possible course: robots in social groupings must be given technology and almost-complete independence as fast as they demanded it, if they were to be kept working for humanity.

The system worked; it had worked; there was no reason why it should not continue to work. Dangret relived the plans for the ceremonies of the day before, and came gradually back to the day itself...with the nagging thought still pulling at his mind, unresolved.

IT WENT with him as he sought Sarise in her apartment, to find her locked in her room, hard at work, and seeing no one, not even him. And it stayed with him through the next lonely week, aggravated by his enforced separation from his wife. More and more he found himself staring at the fresco on his wall, uneasiness growing in him. He tried all the psychological tricks he knew on himself, did his best to set the problem up for the calkers by tracing his thought patterns; but when, more than a week later, Sarise sent word that she was finished, he went to her quarters delighted at the thought that this troublesome idea might be lost for a time in her company.

He found her pacing the airfoam floors of her room, thin and vibrant. She would never take time to eat when she was working, but always seemed to emerge from these periods with an inner life that disregarded her abused body. She couldn't wait for his words or embrace. Shining with excitement, and almost inarticulate, she pulled him to a spot in the center of the room, best suited for reception, and waiting only for his indulgent nod of assent, began the projection of her new piece.

Sarise's work was always basically musical. A composition, of course, might include, or exclude, any known form of sensory stimulation, and it might utilize a number of forms in fairly equal proportions—but, just as the one he had witnessed a week earlier was essentially photographic, a series of three-dimensional images reinforced by sonics, so this, like all of Sarise's work, commanded all the senses, but rested primarily upon the aesthetics of music.

Dangret kept command of himself long enough to reach over and press the levers that would bring Sarise some food, then he was lost completely in the compelling experience of his wife's newest work. To describe either what he saw, felt, tasted, or heard, or the almost too-vivid sensations that welled up in him would be impossible. Great works of art cannot be discussed; they must be participated in. Dangret participated to the fullest, and experienced an emotion he had never known before.

The musical base of the thing modulated to a theme that seemed to close in around him. Tighter and tighter it pressed, squeezing him, forcing him in on himself, pushing from all sides, with no escape, no escape. Dangret's muscles tensed; his heart labored, then beat too fast, labored, pounded again. His salivary action was insufficient, and his peristaltic action, for the first time in a long life, proved uncontrollable. A little fear will go a long way with a perfectly adjusted man.

AS THE last note faded away, and daylight began to stream again through the walls, he lay back in a torpor of relief, unconscious of his wife, the room, or anything else but the churning of his own thoughts and emotions. When, finally, he lifted his head, Sarise was calmly devouring the food he had ordered for her. She smiled at him.

"I did it, didn't I?" she demanded. She could never quite get over a childlike wonder and delight at the things that came out of her. Dangret nodded, and got up slowly. The experience had been shocking, and shock—another word that till now had had only a dictionary meaning—

was what he had needed. He was at the door before he spoke, and then it was only to say, "Sarise, there is something I have to do right now; will you promise to show that to no one else till I come back?"

The woman stared in amazement, but she was exceptionally sensitive, and recognized this was not a time for argument or discussion. She nodded mutely, and watched him go. It was just as well; she needed food and sleep now more than admiration.

* * *

In his office, Dangret began punching furiously at the great bank of communications keys that covered one entire wall. It was a matter of moments till he had connected the Council of Physical Scientists. Men from all over the six civilized galaxies stopped their work, and concentrated on their com units. A convening of the entire council was a rare event. Even rarer were Dangret's opening words.

"Scientists of the world: You know the rights that reside in me as Managing Director. You know that I have utilized those rights no more than my predecessors. There has been no need to direct, but only to manage. Now I invoke my emergency power, for, dependent upon your work, we may soon be faced with a desperate emergency. I shall not attempt to outline the entire matter; that is a problem for the Social Scientists, and when you have finished your part, they shall begin theirs.

"This is secret information. We are on a closed beam, and no man is to repeat these instructions until my formal permission is granted. Now: you are, each of you, to abandon the work you have been doing, and start on..."

He made his instructions specific, assigned units and unit directors, answered startled queries for several hours, and, finally, flicked off the last open line on his com set, his mind finally free of the tiny doubt that had plagued it. The problem was in the hands of the scientists, now, where it belonged. Dangret tried the private com to Sarise's room, found her asleep, and went in to wait in the relaxation of her pleasant quarters until she might wake.

THEY HAD a rare private supper together late in the evening, both of them relaxed and happy in achievement. Sarise never asked questions; it was another of her endearing traits. But this time when they had finished eating, and Dangret had still said nothing about her composition, eagerness overcame her sense of delicacy.

She sat upright on the cushioned floor where they rested, a tense vivid figure, black hair and rosy lips the more colorful over her white robe. "Dan...you haven't said anything," she fumbled a little. She was not accustomed to having to ask for criticism. "My piece...?"

"Yes, your piece." He was thoughtful. "It's the best thing you've ever done, Sarise." His tone was so sober as to make her a little ashamed to have asked. A faint blush of something akin to modesty crept over her face, and drained swiftly away as he went on: "But no one will ever hear it. Sarise, I'm going to exercise a right no Director has used for five hundred years, and ban your composition."

"But why? *Why?*" The woman was on her feet, pacing half across the room, and coming back to lean over him with a look of tortured incomprehension. *"Why?"*

He carefully avoided touching her. His hand on hers would have helped, but this was a matter of Director and artist, not man and wife. "Because it's too good. Because you did what you set out to do. Because you created fear. And because there *is something to fear."*

She sank down beside him, defeated. There was no question of unfairness. This was Dangret's answer, and she knew it must be true. "Something to...*fear?"*

"Yes." Now he could take her hand. "Listen to me, Sarise. I can't tell you all of it, now, not until the C.P.S. finds the answers for me. But the problem is similar with that you outlined in your composition. The fear-reaction you aroused stems from

the concept of compression applied to an organism that *must* expand. You know the dynamics of the directorship are based on expansion—indefinite, unlimited expansion. The compression you outlined...well," he rose, abruptly. "That's all I can tell you now, but believe me, no one must hear that."

She rose with him. "It's that serious then?" Her tone was awed. "The dynamics of the directorship...?" Then her thoughts went back to her piece. "Banned...forever, Dan? Perhaps in a few years, perhaps when your problem is solved?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps *if* my problem is solved." He left her with that.

BECAUSE they were reasonable, adjusted people, both of them put the matter out of their minds after that evening. The problem was in other hands, and when the answer came from the scientists, it would be reopened. It was not that they forgot; rather they compartmented. Dangret checked periodically with the Council on the progress of the research units; Sarise played her piece from time to time and made slight revisions here and there. But, recognizing that final action would have to wait on the findings of the CPS, neither of them allowed his own part of the difficulty to assume emotional proportions.

The answer was a long time coming. When it did, finally, Dangret took the news first to Sarise.

She was walking in the natural garden in front of the official residence, and greeted him with a small sigh.

"I think I'll make a trip to Tangerix III," she told him. "I've been wanting to see the family, and there's something about this poor excuse for vegetation that makes me half wild!" She pointed to the trees and flowers of Earth, none of which could compare in any way with the planned landscapes of robot-constructed homesites on the better planets. Tangerix particularly boasted garden-spot planets.

"Not too soon, I hope." Dangret smiled, teasing a little. "You'd like to be here when your composition is played, wouldn't you?"

She wheeled to face him, breathless. "*When?*" It was a sound more than a word.

"Next week. For the Council of Social Scientists. After that," his words became more sober, "you can go to Tangerix, and I'll go with you."

"But...how can you? You have Council sessions coming, and..."

"And as of next Tuesday, the Directorship will no longer exist, and your piece will help finish it." She raised a puzzled face to his. "No, I can't tell you any more, and I shouldn't have said that much. I... well, I got my answer; it was what I was *afraid* of, you see, and it leaves me no alternative but..." he stopped abruptly. "We'll go to Tangerix. You can make plans now if you like." She followed him into the next room, watched him stand before the fresco. There was an expression on his face that she had never seen before as he summoned a robot and set it to remove the painting.

"I cannot bear to see it any longer."

THE CONCLAVE of social scientists was held on Earth, at a person-to-person meeting—a rare event—and planned that way for only one reason: so that Sarise's composition could have an effect it could not possibly achieve over the other. The Council met early in the morning, and Dangret, in a few words, informed them that they had been assembled for a purpose. But before he told them that purpose, he wished to have them review two sensories, and to contain their curiosity until after the playings.

There was some murmuring of impatience from younger men who could not understand being called away from important work for entertainment, but the older heads, who had worked under Dangret for many years, leaned back in their cushions, and lost themselves in their senses as the first piece started, the historical review Dangret himself had seen many months before.

The younger members had not experienced it before, and the majestic sweep of the epic soon stilled the few murmurs. By the time it was finished, and Sarise's indescribable composition began to fill their senses, they were all completely receptive. When it was over, absolute silence filled the great Council Hall. Dangret himself was almost as much affected on second hearing as the others were on first reception. He let the hush prevail for a full minute—and a minute can be long—before he rose from his seat, and mounted the platform to the bank of microphones.

"Gentlemen and Scientists," he began, "What you have just experienced is a new sensation to most of you. To all of you, I think. It is fear. I shall not take time now to describe to you the background of this composition. As sociologists, you are aware that no artist could generate fear without a reason for fear existing in the artist's environment—even a reason, as this one was, that went unexpressed and unheeded until the artist's crystallization of the emotion forced a search for the cause.

"Since I first heard this piece, I have had the CPS, the Council of Physical Scientists, at work on a difficult problem. Last week I had their answer. I shall return to that, and explain it in a few moments.

"But first, I must make an announcement. The findings of the CPS will constitute the reasons for my decision. Gentlemen, the future is in your hands. The Directorship is over. I, as the last Director, now, with the information I hold, have no ethical choice but to resign and leave the resolution of the problem in your hands. I shall subsequently apply for admission to your ranks, and hope that I may aid in finding the solution, but the problem is one of research, not management.

"WE MUST find a new form of society. If we would keep our comforts and our way of life, if we would keep our race extant, and above all, if we would main-

[*Turn Page*]

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tain our ethic, it is now incumbent upon us—upon you—to develop a civilization that does not rely on the laws of dynamics. A static society.

"Our government and our culture has rested on the unlimited principle of expansion, on continued dynamic development. The universe is large, large enough surely for a race so puny in comparison as ours. But not, I must now tell you, for a civilization constructed like ours.

"Many hundreds of years ago it was a habit of physicists and what were then known as metaphysicists to debate the problem of infinity. There were many differing opinions, and the conclusion in the end, was that the universe was infinite.

"I discovered, in a Council of the Physical Scientists, some months back, that this conclusion had never been proved. I set them the task of proving it. The answer I had last week dictated my actions of today. We must stop; we must change now, and find a new way of living that can exist without constant expansion, because, fellow Scientists, our universe has been finally established to be finite in nature!"

There was silence, but the expressions on the faces before him changed slowly, and he recognized feelings similar to his own. Dread! It had been there, submerged, but now it was out for all to see—the fear of a barrier that none could cross. To men who had lived their lives believing in the limitless of human expansion, the very thought of this truth was as deadly as their physically coming upon the barrier, the limit...

"There is only one alternative to stasis," Dangret said finally; "ancient philosophers were fond of saying that man was his own worst enemy. This has been, for many years, an unnecessary, if not a false, truth. Now we must recognize that man can expand only one further way. The frontiers are not yet gone, but they are vanishing. We must turn back upon a conquest of ourselves, or we must learn to live staticly. The problem I now leave

Did you like the artwork?

Finlay Lawrence Luros

Were there any stories in this issue that you did not like?

.....

Did you like the departments?

Down to Earth Editorial

Book Reviews Forecast

Would you prefer to see the letter department longer?

..... Shorter? the same?

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..... if so, on what subjects?

.....

in your hands. I hope..." and Dangret smiled, because humor, even in this crisis, was an integral part of his being, "I hope that after a brief period of personal stasis, I shall be admitted to your Council to help find a means for the conquests of man by man."

Dangret left the platform, and walked from the hall, without waiting for the shocked silence among the sociologists to articulate itself in words. Outside, he went directly to the apartment where Sarise had watched the scene on the com set.

He entered silently, walked over to where she still sat staring through open set at the hubbub in the hall, and put his hands gently on her two shoulders. She started slightly, and smiled wearily up at him. "So *that* was it?"

"Yes." His voice was tender and rough at the same time. "Yes, that was it. You see what you did. Oh, yes, *you* did it. You're an artist, and you saw things, knew things I didn't. You took my Directorship from me, didn't you? You took this house, and the glory and pleasure. You took everything I had from me, and you did it by being an artist. That was what I loved you for at first you know, and now...." He lifted his hands from her shoulders to cup her face. "Now I love you more than ever. The *least* you can do," and he smiled again, "is take me home to Tangerix III, and let me have a bit of personal stasis."

THE END

Today and Tomorrow

THE RESPONSE to our request for letters has been both gratifying and helpful, and we wish there had been space to publish more of them. Also, copy for this issue had to go to our printers soon after the first issue went on sale; we received many fine letters later, and hope to get some of them in next time. Meanwhile, keep writing! Even if your letter is not published, it still will not represent wasted effort on your part; we want to know *your* opinions, and when a large block of readers indicate general agreement on liking or disliking a particular type of story, then we can feel that this represents a trend of feeling.

Many of you listed L. Sprague de Camp among the authors you'd like to see in forthcoming issues—we have him! Leading off our coming issue is a feature novel by that gentlemen, dealing with the fascinating planet of Krishna, whose level of civilization is stabilized by interplanetary law. But the Krishnans want higher-level products and inventions—particularly guns—and one Felix Borel has a plan whereby he can profit on this desire. The ensuing maze of cross and double-cross makes for solid entertainment, as only de Camp can present it.

H. Beam Piper, another author on your request list, has a tale to tell of a rather special kind of refugee—a man who believed he could escape an unpleasant future by fleeing into the past. He arrived all right, and his higher-level knowledge did assist him, but... It's the "but" that makes the story!

The third feature story is also by one frequently mentioned in your lists—Poul Anderson. And there's a neat problem offered in this tale of tomorrow—a problem which might be posed as, "Who is the most effective kind of pacifist?" We have the well-known, "peace at any price" man, set up against a fighting man who hates war, but who doesn't believe it can be avoided by pious hopes. That's only one facet of this absorbing feature novel, of course.

All in all, friends, I don't think the next issue of FUTURE will be one you'll want to by-pass. — RWL



This department is for you, the readers, where you can discuss science and science fictional subjects in general, and your opinions of *Future* in particular. We will pay two dollars for each letter published, regardless of length.

Everyone liked the price!

Let me be the first to congratulate you on the premier issue of *Future*. I found every story entertaining—yes, even George O. Smith's. Two of the yarns, "Nobody Saw the Ship". by Murray Leinster, and "Battle of the Unborn", by James Blish were stand-outs.

The only obnoxious note about the whole magazine was Bergey's cover. But then, I understand and sympathize with your reasons for using him. I was particularly surprised at the excellent quality of the interior illustrations. Only hope that in the future they reproduce better.

One suggestion: Since the 15 cent price is the most amazing feature of this good magazine, why not stress the fact by giving it a little more cover prominence?

Charles Dye,
787 Washington Street,
New York 14, New York.

* * *

Why, do you suppose, do they put pretty gals in whisky ads?

It's incredible! A top-notch science fiction magazine, complete with big-name writers and a Bergey cover, for only fifteen cents! At that price, I expected low-grade, inferior material, but, by all the tentacles of the Qul-En, the stories are just about as good as those found in any magazine on the market.

One thing is lacking, however. At least, it seems to be lacking, though it may be present in the next issue. I mean, of course, the editorial. That snappy little note in "Down to Earth" was an editorial of a sort, I know, yet you say that this department will be strictly for readers in the future. I hope this doesn't mean that the editor will be crowded out entirely, for the editorial is the personality of the magazine, the thing that gives it a life of its own. At any rate, you haven't chosen to remain anonymous, like some editors I could name.

The stories were a real surprise. "Parking, Unlimited", by Noel Loomis, read more like a George O. Smith's story than did George O. Smith's own "Dynasty of the Lost". I liked them both, however, but preferred the Leinster yarn to either of them. I hope there'll be a lot of hu-

[*Turn To Page 84*]

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JULIUS UNGER ★ Box 35, Dept. D2, Brooklyn 4, New York

mor in *Future*. Next on the list is "The Miniature Menace". Frank Belknap Long is one of my favorite writers; incidentally, I hear that his most recent book sold out. Congratulations, Frank!

I've been cudgeling my brain for something to complain about—it won't be a real fan letter unless I gripe about something—but this is the nearest thing to a perfect issue I've come across. I prefer covers without semi-nude women on them, but I've heard the editorial arguments in favor of this type of window dressing, and must admit that they make sense.

Your offer of payment for letters is one of the finest bits of precedent-setting to hit the science fiction field. The actual money involved isn't particularly important—it's giving some material recognition for goods delivered that really counts. For years, fans have sweated out letters to the various magazines, with no reward in view other than that of seeing their names in print. And yet, their letters help to sell the magazines. My hat is off to the editor honest enough to admit this.

That winds it up, except for this final remark. If the next issue of *Future* is as good as this one, I'll buy a subscription.

Joe E. Dean,
315 West 33d Street,
New York City.

* * *

Length of letter column is experimental, this time. Variety of opinions wanted at first. In future issues, we hope to see more general discussion, and letters will be selected for the meat, for all that we like to see story ratings for general suggestive guidance.

Money for letters? Egad. Please send me some of your money. Although none of my letters have appeared between hard covers yet, I am a solidly-established fan letters-writer (with a perfect score, so far—two written, two published) and you can never tell when I'll be bound.

Seriously, I think the idea is a good one. People writing letters for money will tend to be more careful—and probably will write more interesting letters. The editor, too, will be more careful of what he picks for print, and far less likely to pack his letter columns with drivel. One way to achieve this, I suppose, is to have a very tiny letter column, admitting only three or four letters. This automatically gives the few letters that *are* included a sort of importance in the reader's eye. But I think your system is better.

To begin at the beginning, I don't like Bergey. I understand that a sexy cover is necessary to get lots of impulse-buying, as we say in the grocery business. I don't object to that. What annoys me is that people should think Bergey's women sexy. They're repulsive; they have the same expressions—like horrified dolls. If it's sex you want, why not get a calendar artist who really makes the customers drool?

The inside illustrations aren't so hot, either. They look like they belong in detective story magazines.

All this, though, is just physical (no pun intended, though sure enough there is one there). As for the stories, "Nobody Saw the Ship" is the best. On an absolute scale, I'd give it about a B. B- for the Smith story, which goes in second place—and, for me, this is a high rank for a Smith story to take. Blish's "Battle of the Unborn" almost ties with the Smith piece; there's a lot of meat compressed into this little yarn, but the sad fact is that Blish seldom manages to rise above the B level in short stories.

"Miniature Menace" is in fourth place, rating about C-. There was a time when I liked Long, but that was back before my time—that is, before I began reading. I'm not trying to be funny: he had some short pieces in another magazine about 1936 or so, which I came across while browsing through a fellow-fan's collection; the pieces were damned good.

[*Turn To Page 86*]



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Fifth is Noel Loomis' short. I intensely dislike stories of what I call the "patsy" type, wherein some ignorant mutt, who tells the story in imitation Damon Runyon style, makes a big bust out of some supposedly money-making discovery. This one wasn't as offensive as some specimens of the breed, so I give it a D. Last place is reserved for the del Rey short, but not because I think it's a bad story. The fact is, I don't know. The beginning was so trite—the next author who has a character laugh "humorlessly" in my face is going to have a bomb humorously sent to him—and the flavor of the writing was so obviously routine that I felt no impulse to go on with the story. Thus I have no idea whether the yarn turned out to be a world-beater after it got going. Frankly, I don't care; when an author actually *repels* me at the opening of a yarn, where he ought to be using everything he's got to get me into the rest of it, I give him a flat "E" and close the magazine.

What's the total impression? Well, moderately good. I wouldn't say that you have the best science fiction magazine on the market already, but you haven't made a bad start by any means. And then there's the low price of the book, too. Altogether, I can probably tell you what you want to know in one sentence: "I'll buy your magazine".

Al Wickham,
19 West 27th Street,
New York 1, New York.

* * *

We're trying for good stories, of all types in science fiction, but not straight fantasy.

I've just finished reading the first issue of your magazine, *Future,* and I honestly think you have a future in the field of science fiction. The issue was, to my way of thinking, a cleverly assembled first issue—that is, the stories in it were what I'd call middle-of-the-road science fiction. The general tone of the letters you receive regarding this issue can, or

should, influence your editorial policy for the next issue. My own preference in the matter would be toward more science with the science fiction, rather than the impossibly fantastic fiction that is being published in a number of other magazines.

I'd also like to suggest that you include informative and instructive short articles on any and all branches of pure science and engineering. I like them all, and always read them. There is one thing, though, I think you should do, and that is to tone down your covers and tell the artist responsible that he should try to make the scene portray that part of the story a little more accurately. "Cheesecake" has its place, but I don't care for it on the covers of a science fiction magazine.

You might try to get such authors as A. E. Van Vogt, Wilmar Shiras, Raymond F. Jones, L. Ron Hubbard, H. Beam Piper, J. J. Coupling, Theodore Sturgeon, L. Sprague de Camp, Isaac Asimov, Lester del Ray, etc. The reason? They write the kind of stories I like to read. I also like most of the authors in your first issue.

Well, I think I've said enough in my first letter to an editor after more than 20 years of reading science fiction. I'll just say good luck to you!

Ray Saso,
37-32 73d Street,
Jackson Heights, New York.

* * *

But our name was on the contents page, still is!

This is my first letter to any science fiction magazine, although I have been reading them for at least 12 years. Though this may seem as though I have no intererst in science fiction, except for reading the stories, such is not the case. I have been disgusted with the quality of letters in some of the magazines, and others were on discussions either above my head, or of no interest to me. But I decided to write to *Future* as the magazine seems to be a good one

[*Turn Page*]



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(though it will be very good if forthcoming issues are as good as this one).

I do have some requests and suggestions that might improve the magazine: (1) Print the length of the stories. Some people, myself included, don't like to put down a story until it's finished; and when I have only a limited time available to read a story, it is helpful to know about how long it will take to read it. (2) Please do not make the letter department a gathering place for those letter-writers who just seem to write for the pleasure of seeing their names in print, and clutter up the pages with tripe and senseless discussions. (3) Do not forbid the mention of competitive magazines in the letter columns; we all know they are published, and that many readers of this magazine will and do read them. (4) Please print the name of the editor some place on the contents page of the next issue. I dislike magazines that seem to desire to hide the name of the man responsible for the stories and departments in it. Then again, it is nicer to start a letter with "Dear Bill". "Dear Joe", or "Dear Whatever-your-name-is. The way I had to start this letter, "Dear Sir", is so impersonal.

Buz Austin,
2574 Holland Avenue,
Bronx 67, New York.

To all others who wrote in, our thanks. We would like to know if you think "Down to Earth", in this issue, is too long, too short, or just about right. And, whether or not we publish your letter, please believe us when we say that your letter will be read and suggestions given careful attention. We are inclined to be swayed by your story-opinions, whenever there is a preponderance for or against a particular type of yarn.

—RWL

★ ★ ★

The Sky's Still The Limit!

(an editorial)

A FEW days before the first issue of FUTURE went on sale, we had the privilege of attending a meeting of the Author's Club, a gathering where the discussion was devoted to science fiction, this night. A number of science fiction authors were present, notably Fletcher Pratt, L. Sprague de Camp, Theodore Sturgeon, H. Beam Piper, and Judith Merril—who was there in the dual role of author and Anthologist. Publishers were represented by Harry Maule of Random House, Walter Bradbury of Doubleday, and Martin Greenberg of Gnome Press. Groff Conklin, well known science fiction Anthologist; L. Jerome Stanton, chairman of the Hydra Club (an association of professionals in the field); Sam Merwin, genial colleague who edits several of FUTURE'S competing pulps, and yours truly rounded out the picture.

For the benefit of the many notables in the Author's Club, who were largely unfamiliar with science fiction, a discussion of "What is Science Fiction" proceeded...and continued far into the night. Nearly everyone of the science fictioneers at hand offered definitions, while the next party responded, "Yes...but..." When the meeting expired, while there were certain areas of general agreement, no completely satisfying definition of science fiction had been stated.

We listened with considerable interest at this phenomenon; off-hand, one would think that among those gathered—authors, publishers, anthologists, and editors—some mutually satisfactory definition of our common interest could be found. But it couldn't. And we opened our own mouth to note that there is a very good reason for this lack of agreement: although the various readers

[*Turn To Page 91*]

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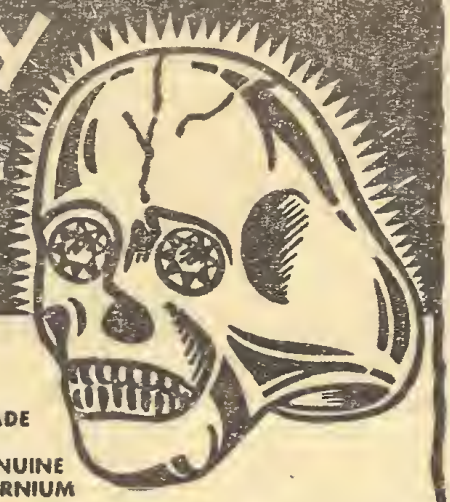
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and authors may agree on a definition for science fiction, no such agreement has been codified and adopted by editors and publishers; each publisher and editor plays by ear, even though many will agree that such-and-such was a fine example of science fiction, while such-and-such...well, no.

Mr. Kafka, Vice President of the Author's Club, noted with interest that the lack of agreement made for a particularly enjoyable evening. And this lack of agreement, we think, is a good thing. It means that there is less likelihood for the field as a whole to become stereotyped; there's always a chance for the author who comes up with a good story that contains a fresh approach.

We hope it will stay that way for another twenty years in magazine science fiction.

— The Editor

From the Bookshelf

In this department, we will review all science fiction books sent to us, so far as space permits.

FROM Bantam Books, New York, we have seen a fine anthology entitled *Shot in the Dark,* 23 stories collected by Judith Merril. There are such excellent stories as H. G. Wells' "The Star"; Stephen Vincent Benet's narrative poem, "Nightmare Number Three"; Lewis Padgett's "The Dark Angel", and William Tenn's "Brooklyn Project". Highly enjoyable are Frederic Brown's "Knock"; James MacCreigh's "A Hitch in Time"; Hugh Raymond's "Spokesman for Terra", and Ray Bradbury's "Mars is Heaven". I have not had a chance to read the rest, which include "The Halfling", by Leigh Brackett; "Voices in the Dust", by Gerald Kerch; "Gentlemen, Be Seated", by Robert Heinlein; "Mr. Lupescu", by Anthony Boucher; "The Day of the Deepies", by Murray Leinster; "The Shadow and the Flash", by Jack London; "He

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Was Asking After You", by Margery Allingham; "Strange Playfellow", by Isaac Asimov; "Who is Charles Avison?", by Edison Tesla Marshall; "The Bronze Parrot", by R. Austin Freeman; "Life on the Moon", by Alexander Samalan, and "Blunder", by Philip Wylie. I have, however, read and enjoyed James Thurber's "Interview With a Lemming", though I'm blessed if I can picture it as belonging in a science fiction anthology, delightful as it is. And I rebel at seeing "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar", one of Edgar Allan Poe's more pretentious bits of boredom, which contains nothing shocking except the intent to shock.

Most of these stories were culled from the pulps, and none of them (with the exception of Poe) pretend to be anything more in the way of literature than they are—and they are, for the main, enjoyable stories, some of which can be re-read with pleasure.

In any event, *Shot in the Dark*, is a deal where you can't lose for 25c.

Shasta Publishers, 5525 Blackstone, Chicago, Illinois, has sent me a copy of *Sidewise in Time*, a small collection of stories by Murray Leinster (the book's title is from the opening novelet), with a cover jacket by Hannes Bok that is pastel and charming in its effect—and as such totally unsuited to the contents of the book. By which I mean that any person not already familiar with Leinster would never suspect the tough-minded, masculine material to be found within from the jacket illustration.

In addition to the title story, there are "Proxima Centaurii", "A Logic Named Joe", "De Profundis", "The Fourth Dimensional Demonstrator", and "The Power". Of the lot, I find the shorter stories to be more endurable, for the credible presentation of alien viewpoints in "De Profundis" and the wry humor in the other three. But the two novelets are decidedly well done, even if I feel no impulse to give them a second going over. The volume sells for $3.00.

—*RWL*

not work was the best way to urge him on.

Professor Milton sat down with a superiorly tolerant smile. "I shall give you five minutes," he told the Russian. "If you prove this impossible, I will desist with but a formal apology from those Doubting Thomases."

"Clip him," snapped Ingalls, pointing a revolver at the professor.

Professor Milton smiled. "Field theory," he told Ingalls. "Pull the trigger, and see what happens!"

Ingalls grunted, pointed the pistol at the wall and fired. The explosion was but a piffling one, more of a slow burn than a sharp bang. The bullet oozed from the end of the barrel and fell to the floor with a thud.

Ingalls pulled a blackjack from his pocket and started forward, lifting it. Then he stopped. Moving the sap was difficult, like trying to swing a sledge under water.

"All metals encounter resistive fields here," said Professor Milton.

"At him bare handed, then" snapped Ingalls.

"Wait," said Moreiko. "The world need not lose a brilliant brain. Once I have convinced him of the fallacy, he will forget this entirely."

"Fallacy?" snapped Milton angrily. "You think I cannot divide the world?"

MOREIKO smiled. "No, my esteemed colleague, I know you can divide the world; that all the earth grants. The earth does not want itself divided."

"Even to eliminate trouble?"

"If I prove to you that the trouble will not be eliminated, then will you forget this venture?"

"Yes, but it is the only way."

Moreiko nodded.

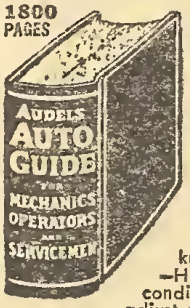
"I presume that you have set up a plane of cleavage through the earth. One, say, that will divide the earth and also screen the gravitic attraction of each half for the other so that centrifugal force will cause the two halves to separate?"

"Yes."

"Then, once separated by several

[*Turn Page*]

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millions of miles, you believe that no arguments can ensue?"

"Yes."

"Because you think that neither of us can get at the other to do harm?"

"Yes," replied Milton.

"But Professor," smiled the Russian, "may I point out that in this equipment; in this generator of some hitherto unknown field of force, you have developed the means of interplanetary travel?"

"Perhaps?"

"Now, then," said Moreiko, "if you must demonstrate your power, divide the moon. But remember that separating the earth into two parts generates *interplanetary* strife instead of mere global argument. Have I answered your problem?"

* * *

THINGS are less troublesome now. A bit of impending disaster will draw people together; it is often a sorry fact that once the disaster is averted, those people will again revert to their former animosity. But all that the people of the earth have to do to remember is to look upwards.

There are two moons in the sky, moons once hemispherical but whose edges daily crumble into crude spheres.

A nice reminder—and also another problem for Professor Milton. He has not yet returned to his Institution, for he is living in a glass dome on one of the moons, trying to work out the problem of bringing them together again.

He claims it to be but a matter of time.

THE END

[*Continued From Page 27*]

right. Because it's all waiting for you. I've seen it and I know. Beauty and greatness you can't imagine now. I don't know when, or how, but it can be yours someday. If you can hang on. And it'll be yours not just for a little while, like it was for me, but forever.

I guess it's up to you to prove whether Durach was insane or not.

I wonder if my thoughts are being recorded now by Carleth and Reeta for you to read? I can't tell. I've lost them. Things around me are blurred, and I seem to be falling down through a gray, slow rain...

* * *

From a midnight teleaudocast by International Information Service. New York City. September 9, 1983:

Reporter: *The preceding has been teleod as a special interest feature, and is not intended as a factual report, naturally. The body of the man who appeared so mysteriously, according to reports, from the atmosphere two miles above Manhattan, and crashed into the city, cannot be satisfactorily identified. The metal scroll which fell after him, and which was just narrated for your interest, is obviously the work of a quack looking for notoriety, and a possible niche in Fortean records.*

However, the Atomic Energy Commission has ordered a complete scanning of Uranium Pile personnel. This move is reported to be motivated by the discovery that during the afternoon, Ronal LeStrang, President of the Atomic Energy Commission, disappeared, and no trace of him has been found, up to this time.

Teleflashes will be brought to you directly from the scanning rooms as soon as further reports come in regarding President LeStrang. Security Police say that perhaps foreign agents are again trying to bore from within...though they insist that there is no proof up to this time that any foreign State is responsible for LeStrang's disappearance.

And now there will be an interlude of music, brought to you by special permission of Interplanetary Cultural Foundation, through the facilities of I.I.S's new Teleospan System. The first number features the Martian folk dance cycle...

THE END

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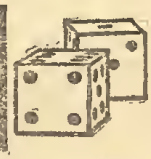
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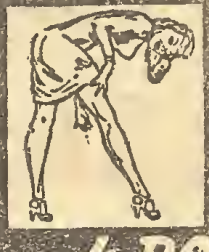


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[*Continued From Page 44*]

more or less. I say, uncomfortable: "Well-l-l, Jode," I says, "I guess it was because there ain't any real mandrake in America. Ashes of mandrake was called for, and I couldn't get any, so I hunted up a weed that is right much like mandrake. Mayapple is what they call it. I used that. It's a close cousin, but it musta lacked one of those catalysts or anticatalysts real mandrake woulda had—"

Jode grabs me and shakes hard. "What happened! And how is it gonna be fixed?"

Reluctant, I haul a notebook outa my pocket. I open up to where I copied old Hermes Trismigestus' formula for making the elixir of youth.

"Look," I say. "The formula is headed, *To Make an Olde Manne a Youthe Againe.* It gives the directions I tried to follow. I—uh—I guess the answer is in this here last paragraph I come close to not copying at all. Uh—it says at the end, *To Make an Aged Crone into a Younge Damsel: the formula is ye same, excepte ye ashe of mandrake is to bee lefte oute.*

Jode whacks me. Hard. Wow! To be fair, I guess, I'd ha' done the same. But—anyway, Jode and me have a right nice cottage, now, and I got a pretty good private experimental laboratory in it, and I'm working on the problem of adjusting matters in a more nearly normal way. Jode ain't been after me so much lately, though. It looks what you might call a sort of change of viewpoint is developing. Jode always did go in for fancy clothes, and the opportunity and cash for fancy clothes are on the job. Jode dresses magnificent, and is kind of looking the world over from a new viewpoint. The new viewpoint gets more tolerable as time goes on. I am treated with a certain amount of respect and—like I said—I got a swell laboratory. I pass for Jode's brother. Jode seems to treat me like a kid brother, too. She gets mad as hell when I tell her she uses too much make-up.

[*Continued From Page 65*]

Trust the General to see you through. He made a mistake once, but he's wiser now. Forget Ecclesiastes and remember a jingle of Kipling's instead: *Now these are the Laws of the Jungle, and many and mighty are they; but the head and the hoof of the Law, and the haunch and the hump is—Obey!* Betray rhymes as well, but it takes a lot more background and practice. Now beat it, before I really start preaching!"

* * *

I DIDN'T need to hunt up the pilot; I had a bottle of Martian canal juice of my own in the cabin. But I'd consumed more of the book than the bottle when morning came and a knock sounded outside.

The General came in when I grunted, his face pinched with fatigue, and his eyes red with lack of sleep. He nodded at the book, dropped onto the cot, and poured himself a generous slug before he looked at me.

"A remarkable book, Bill, by a remarkable man. But you know that by now. Dynamite, of course, but something we'll have to smuggle in to save for a possible posterity. And stop looking so damned surprised. Any man Stanislaus trusted with that is my equal or my better, as far as I'm concerned. After we land I have ways of seeing you get knighthood and a Colonel's title, so you're practically an officer, anyhow. And I'm neither General nor Duke—just a messenger boy for the late deceased Stanislaus Korzynski. He died of canal fever day before yesterday, you know."

It was coming too thick and fast, and I didn't answer that. I reached for the bottle and poured a shot down my throat without bothering with a glass. The General held out his, watched me fill it, and downed the shot before going on again. "Not much of a Serviceman, am I, Bill? But it has to be that way. Nobody knows the name he used, but there are plenty on Earth who remember his face. Or haven't you figured out yet who he was from the book?"

"I've had my suspicions," I admitted. "Only I dunno whether I'm crazy or he was."

"Neither. You're right, he's the supposedly assassinated Prince Stellius Asiaticus, rightful ruler of the Empire! Here's a note he sent you."

There wasn't much to it: *Friend 'Major—it was over the hill for me, after all. If you have children, as I intend to, pass on my new name to them, and someday our offspring may get together and discuss the phoenix bird. Elmer C. Clesiastes.*

"The phoenix," the General muttered over my shoulder while he reached for the bottle. "Now what the deuce did he mean by that?"

"What is it, anyway?"

"A legendary bird of Grecian mythology—the only one of its kind. It lived for a few hundred years, then built itself a funeral pyre and sat fanning the flames with its wings until it was consumed. After that, a new bird hatched out of the ashes and started all over again. That's why they used it for the symbol of immortality."

Below us, the rockets rumbled tentatively and then bellowed out, while the force of the jets crushed us back against the wall. Beyond the porthole, Mars dropped away from us, as the Empire turned back to its nest. But I wasn't thinking much of that, impressive though it was.

Somehow, I was going to have the children Stanislaus had mentioned, and I'd live long enough to see that they remembered the name he'd chosen, atom bombs or no bombs. Because I knew him at last, and the pessimist was a prince, all right—the Prince of Optimists.

The General and I sat toasting him and discussing the phoenix legend and civilization's ups and downs while Mars changed from a world to a round ball in the background of space. It wasn't military or proper, but we felt much better by the time we found and confiscated the second bottle.

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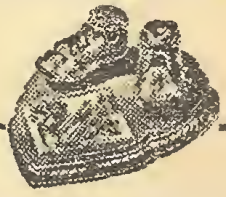
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